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The Changing Face of America Mexican Immigration and the Impact On the United States

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Appendix D - UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM
SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: Constance Hankins

College: Arts & Sciences Department: College Scholars

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PROJECT TITLE: The Changing Face of America
Mexican Immigration and the Impact On the United States

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: Fran Ansley, Faculty Mentor

Date: Dec. 9, 1999

Comments (Optional):

See comments on manuscript.
Fine job —

The Changing Face of America

Mexican Immigration and the Impact on the United States

Constance L. Hankins

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Introduction

How many people would voluntarily read about Mexican immigration to the United States? That's hard to answer. If the question were how many people *should* voluntarily read about Mexican immigration, the answer would be every American citizen--especially the half who vote. Though immigration may not be a topic on the forefront of everyone's pleasure reading list, it is undeniably an issue that impacts each citizen directly or indirectly. Moreover, it seems to be a topic that most people are comfortable discussing in inverse proportions to the amount of research they have actually done. The uninformed person has a hard and fast opinion for every angle of the issue, usually arriving at the general conclusion, "send 'em back to where they came from!" The informed person faces the complexity of Mexican immigration with an exasperation towards those who draw their sentiments too quickly. The informed is struck by the amount of research showing Mexican immigration (both legal and illegal) to be beneficial for the United States. That this research is slow to seep into public opinion suggests far more deeply rooted reasons than pure ignorance. Surely there are those who understand the benefits of continued immigration but who are still uncomfortable with the source of people, the resulting changes in America's demography, the idea of change in general, or any combination of these and other reasons.

The following essay is not intended to explore the depths of the reasons Americans are uncomfortable with immigration. Those reasons are complicated and unflattering to a country still struggling with full acceptance of a Negro population that did not come on its own accord, but rather (unlike today's immigrants) was brought here purposefully. The following essay is written for the purpose of informing. The reader may still have uncomfortable or ambivalent feelings toward immigration upon turning the last page, but that will not be on account of ignorance.

Introduction

Writing with the purpose to inform can take two different directions: writing to exclude or writing to include. Writing to exclude is that sort of academic writing that tends to exclude anyone who doesn't have a P, H, and D surrounding his or her name. The word choice makes great use of dictionaries, and the reader walks away feeling enlightened on some plane that the rest of society will probably never reach (nor pretend to know exists).

The other option is writing to include. This style of writing recognizes the importance of the message reaching readers beyond the scholarly elite. The concepts are put more simply, the style is more reminiscent of a popular journal article than a "RESEARCH THESIS," and the aim is more the understanding and introduction of new ideas than new vocabulary words. Hopefully the reader will see this as a complicated issue requiring much thought and research in disguise as a "good read." Perhaps it will make it to your nightstand.

E Pluribus Unum
“From Many, One”
--United States National Motto

*Remember, remember always, that all of us,
and you and I especially,
are descended from immigrants and revolutionists.*
--Franklin D. Roosevelt in an address to the
Daughters of the American Revolution

From all over the world, from all social classes, from all races, Americans are unified in their variety. Part of what distinguishes America is that it has always been an immigrant nation. John F. Kennedy, the first president of Irish descent, heralded immigrants as the foundation to our “Nation of nations”:

The contribution of immigrants can be seen in every aspect of our national life. We see it in religion, in politics, in business, in the arts, in education, even in athletics and in entertainment. There is no part of our nation that has not been touched by our immigrant background. Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life.¹

From the early Europeans to the current flows of Asians and Hispanics, people from all over the world come to this land spurred on by the ideals offered here: new life, opportunity, and freedom. Though the United States that immigrants encounter is often racist, hostile, and repressive, its appeal remains untarnished.

The Statue of Liberty welcomes the huddled masses of nearly 70,000 foreigners who arrive in the U.S. each day. Approximately 60,000 of those are here temporarily as students, business travelers, religious workers, and tourists. About 2,200 are here as refugees seeking a safe haven from their own country. They are invited to become permanent residents. The final group is the roughly 5,000 foreigners who make unauthorized entry into the United States each day. About 4,000 of these entrants are apprehended immediately after crossing the border; 1,000 of them escape detection while

E Pluribus Unum
"From Many, One"

entering the U.S., or they come here legally and slip from legal to illegal status by outstaying the terms of their visas. Some will return to their countries, but many will remain.²

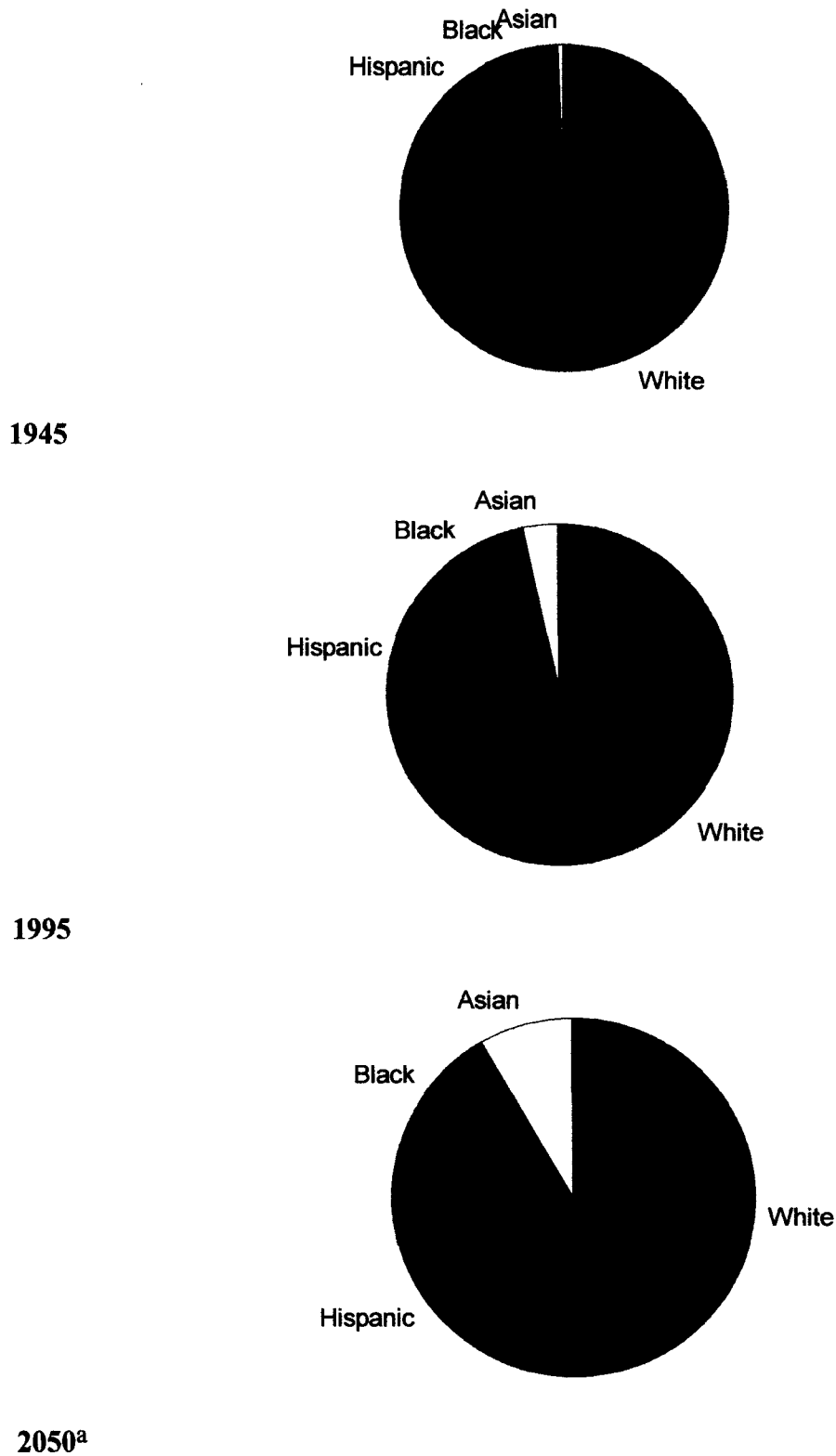
Americans' attitude toward the foreigners who come here is ironic given that all U.S. citizens (yes, even the Native Americans who immigrated here long before they met the first Europeans at the dock of the *Mayflower*) are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. "The name 'America' was given to this continent by a German mapmaker, Martin Waldseemuller, to honor an Italian explorer, Amerigo Vespucci. The three ships which discovered America sailed under a Spanish flag, were commanded by an Italian sea captain, and included in their crews an Englishman, an Irishman, a Jew and a Negro."³

Americans define themselves by their immigrant heritage. However, throughout history the attitude toward immigrants has always been ambivalent. Whether immigrants are a benefit or a burden to the country they come to is a complicated question to answer. Americans are left to worry if immigrants are to be welcomed or feared. This worry is not a recent emotion, but rather a recurring theme in times of economic stagnation or downturns. There is always the concern that more immigrants would cause economic, social, and political disruption.

However, the worry surrounding today's immigrants cannot be so simplistically explained as mere economic uncertainty. It is more aptly described as a deep, ideological uneasiness about the demographic future of America. The sheer volume of immigrants from Latin America and Asia imposes a greater likelihood that they will change America rather than blending in easily and swallowing the majority culture as have many immigrants of the past. Immigrants have historically been welcomed to America with the understanding that they would come here and become good Americans. As that prospect becomes less likely, public sentiment towards immigration in general is sure to be surrounded by one of the most deeply-rooted fears of all: the fear of change.

E Pluribus Unum
"From Many, One"

United States Demographics



^a Projected from Census Bureau, 1996

E Pluribus Unum
"From Many, One"

The government took its first step toward controlling immigration in the 1880s when a wave of immigrants caused concern that too many "undesirable" people were entering the U.S. Among those barred from entry were prostitutes, low-skilled workers, and the Chinese. The next concern was from which countries should immigrants be accepted. The earliest settlers and the majority of the populace were from the northern and western European countries. It was a largely homogenous group in race, culture, and religion. At the turn of the century, more than 1 million immigrants came each year, primarily from southern and eastern Europe. From this change in sending countries came the first sentiments that too many people were coming from the "wrong" countries. This led to qualitative and quantitative measures in the 1920s to protect the northern and western European majority.

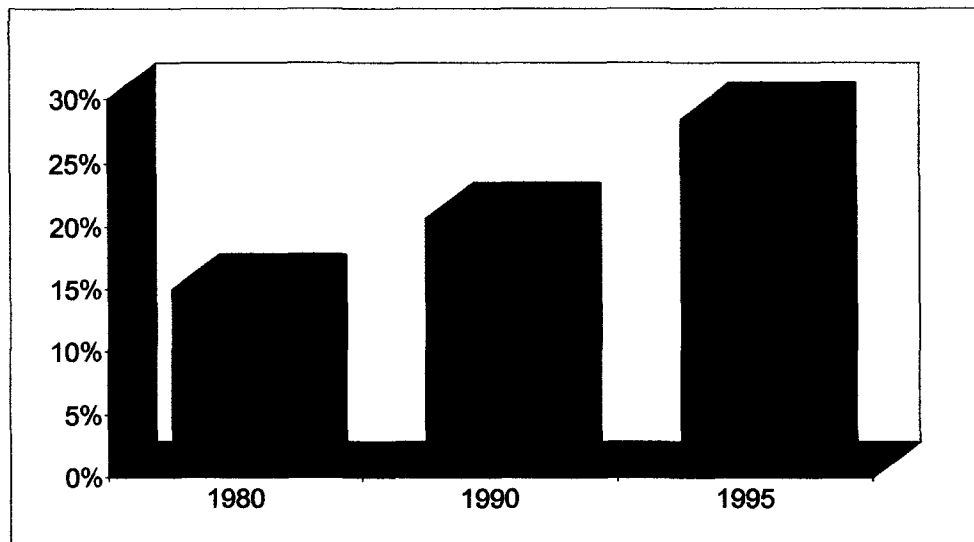
In 1965, Congress changed the system from one of national quotas and replaced it with a complex system granting entrance to three specific groups: those with certain relatives already living in the United States, people needed to fill vacant high-level jobs, and refugees. Surprisingly, this caused the source countries to shift from Europe to Latin America and Asia. Changes in the U.S. economy and increasing emigration pressure in Latin America made the control of unauthorized migrants an even greater concern than before.

Immigration raises many difficult questions. Who are we? What kind of society are we trying to reach? Who should we welcome to the United States? How should we handle those who arrive uninvited? At what point would we forsake our immigrant heritage and focus on maintaining the status quo? These questions can best be answered with objective information on the current implications of immigration--socially, politically, and economically. As Mexico is currently the leading source country, it will be the focus of this investigation.

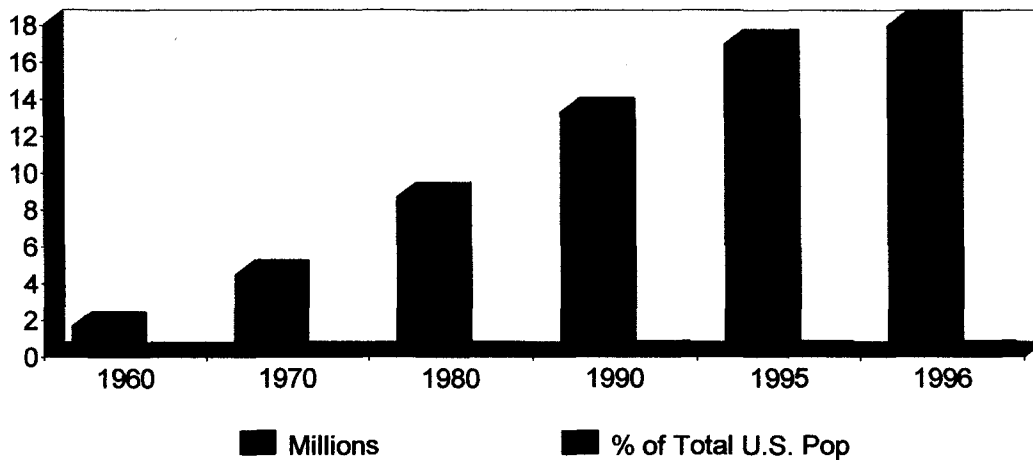
There are three reasons why the immigration debate is a hot topic and growing in intensity. First, they just keep coming. Each year the number of immigrants continues to rise. Legal and illegal immigration adds an estimated 1 million people per year to the U.S. population.

E Pluribus Unum
"From Many, One"

**Foreign-born Persons of Mexican Origin
as a Percentage of Foreign-born U.S. Population**



Increase of the Mexican-origin Population in the U.S. between 1960 and 1996



Source: Crossings, 262.

Second, change is hard. The newest immigrants don't look, talk, worship or dress like the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority of the populace. Just as the initial northern and western European settlers had trouble accepting the southern and eastern Europeans to the United States, today it is difficult to accept those outside of Europe. Also, immigrants are coming and settling in such massive numbers that assimilation to the dominant culture is becoming less necessary.

E Pluribus Unum
"From Many, One"

Third, it's not clear what to think of all this. There is no clear consensus among researchers, politicians, or U.S. citizens as to whether immigration is beneficial or detrimental on the whole. It is clearly a case of pros along with cons; however, it is difficult to measure these pros and cons qualitatively. In fact, in a world where we rely on statistics and measurable facts, there are no precise numbers in the immigration debate. Consider this: For the past twenty years the Immigration and Naturalization Service has apprehended roughly one million illegals a year, most of them Hispanics. However, two or three or five million others may not have been seized. On the other hand, one Hispanic may have been apprehended two or three or six times and show up in the statistics as six people instead of one.⁴ The average American is left to draw conclusions from politicians' rhetoric and media soundbytes. Whether today's immigrants will add to the country through success in business and education as have previous waves of immigrants, or become a social burden that adds to the underclass, is still unknown.

There are many considerations in seeking an objective answer to such a subjective question as, "Is immigration good or bad?": Good or bad for whom? Good or bad in the short term or the long term? Good or bad in different categories that seem to balance out when taken in their totality? One must examine the net drain on social services and balance that out with the net contribution in taxes. The displacement of low-skilled labor is counterbalanced with more laborers and consumers in the economy. What is the impact on education? What is the difference in cost to the state and local versus the national government? How does immigration stratify the nation socially? How are individuals' lives affected? Answers to these questions still do not promise an easy, clear-cut answer to the larger question: What is the impact of today's immigrants on the U.S? However, answers will begin to form a basis for more comprehensive and educated opinions.

Data and Definitions

China is a big country inhabited by many Chinese.

--Charles DeGaulle

Americans know more about Mexican cuisine than about the country of Mexico itself. The United Mexican States cover 1,972,550 square kilometers of land (slightly less than three times the state of Texas). The country is home to just over 100 million people. Sixty percent of the people are *mestizo* (mixed European and Indian descent) and thirty percent are *indigena* (Native Americans or Indians). Everyone is aware that the major language is Spanish, but there are also over 50 indigenous languages. Ninety percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Ernesto Zedillo currently is president of their democratic form of government. Mexico borders the U.S. (to the north), and Guatemala and Belize (to the southeast).

Mexico is the leading source country of illegal immigrants to the U.S. and accounts for about 1.3 million, or about 40% of the total. Mexico also accounts for about 25% of all legal immigrants. California is the leading state for illegal residents with about 1.4 million who are there undocumented. El Salvador and Guatemala rank second and third in sending their population to the U.S. Canada ranks just 16th among legal immigrants, but fourth among illegals.

Laying the groundwork for a clear understanding of the following chapters involves defining some key terms. Many of these words get thrown around casually; when someone is stopped and asked for a definition, chin rubbing often ensues. Though the process may seem trivial, one can see even from the word *immigrant* itself that accuracy avoids misunderstanding and faulty conclusions.

Immigrants: Persons from other countries who are lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States. They then have the option of becoming naturalized citizens. They must be granted a visa, normally from a U.S. consulate in their home country, and use that along with their

Data and Definitions

foreign passport to enter the U.S. A “green card” is given to them to signify permanent resident status. (Incidentally, this card is no longer green.) The other legal means of immigration is to adjust their status while in the United States from temporary to permanent resident. Certain groups of immigrants are subject to a numerical cap, while others are exempt from this cap.

Nonimmigrant: Any person who is granted entry from another country to stay for a specified period of time. This group includes tourists, foreign students, business visitors, journalists, foreign government officials, and persons working in international organizations such as NATO.

Refugees: People who fear political, religious, or other types of persecution if they return to their home country. They must apply for refugee status while still abroad. According to the Immigration Reform Act of 1990, the President and Congress determine the number of refugees to be accepted to the U.S. each year. Once accepted to the U.S. as refugees, they have the option of becoming naturalized citizens.

Asylees: People who fear their home country just as refugees do. However, unlike refugees, they first come to the United States and then request safe haven here. The total number who come helps determine how many the U.S. decides to accept. The massive volume of asylum applicants (more than 100,000 per year in recent years) means that many are rejected. Asylees are expected to return to their home country when the source of fear no longer exists.

Unauthorized Migrants, Undocumented Workers: Those people who enter the United States with neither an immigrant visa nor a nonimmigrant visa. The terms are more euphemistic and the wording of choice among many who find *illegal aliens* dehumanizing. Approximately one-half enter illegally either by land through places in the border where the border patrol has trouble

Data and Definitions

detecting them, or by sea, landing on U.S. shores undetected. The other half enter the U.S. legally but then slip into illegal status by overstaying the terms of their visas. This type is much harder to apprehend. It is impossible to arrive at exact numbers of unauthorized migrants, but it was estimated to be about 3.4 million in 1992, and to be increasing by 300,000 annually.

America: The landmass that extends from the highest point of Canada to the very bottom of Chile. People on the North and South American continents are *all* considered Americans. Hispanics in the western hemisphere refer to their U.S. neighbors to the north as North Americans (a term too broad to specify the United States in that it includes Canada as well). To Hispanics, the term “Americans” without any reference such as “Latin,” “Central” or “South,” means that they are speaking of themselves. Thus, the definition of *America* is a relative term, depending on the nationality and point of view of the speaker.

Central America: Not somewhere around Iowa! Central America is composed of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, British Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.

Latin America: Includes Mexico, Central America, the West Indies, and all of South America. The name “Latinos/as” captures this group en masse; however, there are distinct ethnic differences within the group.

Hispanics: Don’t get confused! Hispanics are from Spain. However, the U.S. government has broadened this definition extensively to include all people of Spanish or Latin American descent. “Hispanic” gained a reluctant national acceptance in the mid-seventies. When needing an umbrella word to describe all Spanish-speakers in the U.S., some Latinos avoid the word “Hispanic,” viewing it as an English invention. They still prefer identifying separate ethnicities to

Data and Definitions

conglomerating all Spanish speakers into a single word. While it is often useful to have a catchall word for people from south of the border, that's all it is--a catchall. No one should infer universal traits among Hispanics, or for that matter, that they look at themselves as a group. Take for example Chicago, where the three major Hispanic groups live in constant discord and geographic isolation. They simply use "Mexican," "Puerto Rican," or "Cuban"--according to whatever the case may be.

***Chicanos(as)*:** Americans of Mexican descent who have retained at least some of the Spanish language and participate in a distinctive U.S. subculture. It is apparently a folk abbreviation of "Mexicano," in which case the Spanish pronunciation for the letter "x" is a hard "ch" sound. The word *Chicano* is widely accepted, though some Mexican Americans are offended by it, seeing it as a barrier to acceptance.

The word *immigrant* itself can be a problematic term in the immigration debate in that the vast numbers of illegals here make it necessary to clarify whether one is referring to an illegal or a legal immigrant. This clarification is merely a formality, a way to differentiate. The fact of the matter is that other than the legality of their status, there is very little difference between the two groups.

The idea that illegal and legal immigrants are distinct phenomena that can be addressed separately is erroneous. Employers, for example, who are currently sanctioned by law from hiring illegals, have found that there is no reliable way to distinguish illegal from legal immigrants. Even if there were a more reliable method to make that distinction, it is still a complicated matter. It would make the false assumption that illegals are a separate population existing apart from legal immigrants and the rest of American society.

In reality, "more than two decades of research have proven that illegals come here for the same reasons and by means of the same networks of friends and families as legal immigrants."¹ The Immigration and Naturalization Service has estimated that fifty percent come here legally and

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simply overstay the terms of their visas, slipping into illegal status. Thus, it comes as no surprise that illegals live with and among other legal immigrants--and U.S. citizens. This fact is supported by a federally sponsored study of illegals who chose amnesty under the 1986 reform law. The research found that they typically live in the same households as legal permanent residents and U.S. citizens. This research brought to light the complexity of targeting illegal residents and caused the INS to stop sweeps of immigrant neighborhoods.²

Understanding that illegal and legal immigrants are difficult to differentiate with the tools currently at our disposal is essential because many policy makers assume a sharp distinction between illegals and legal that simply does not exist. So much of the immigration rhetoric seems to uphold an "illegal immigrant bad, legal good" sort of philosophy. This false dichotomy causes people to throw all the costs and burdens of immigration at the illegals and attribute all the gains and benefits of immigration to the legal. From a civil liberties point of view, it is important to make a distinction between the two. From a debate point of view it is misleading to pretend that bright lines exist between these two groups, assuming that we can draw conclusions about one that do not apply to the other.

Thus this is a story of Mexican immigration--illegal and legal. To separate illegals and legal and address only one group would be to tell only half the story, leaving the reader with a one-sided plot and no real conclusion. The story will be more broad than it is deep--and for a purpose. While immigration is a subject that is intrinsically deep and complicated, the issues are intertwined within each other so that one cannot look at one aspect without drawing upon knowledge and information from another. Thus, all the implications of immigration must be understood on a preliminary level before a deeper search would be productive. Moreover, immigration is not a sort of problem that could be computed, digested, and formulated into a neat solution. The issues surrounding immigration are heart issues as well, requiring a country of immigrants to make decisions that will rest on the conscience of a nation.

What follows is an attempt to read a single chapter from each of the volumes of the immigration story--not to solve any one problem, but to better understand Mexican immigration

Data and Definitions

at large. If nothing else, reading this should awaken the reader to the enormity and immediacy of immigration. At best it will incite a fire. It will incite the sort of fire that doesn't get weaker and weaker with time and complacency, but that will grow impatient with misleading political rhetoric, indignant with prejudice and racism, and intolerant of ignorance. Fires can be devastatingly destructive or they can be used to wipe out the old and prepare for the new. May this be that sort of fire.

La Familia

A little more than kin

--Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Family characteristics, values, and identity often absorb and reflect the values of a country's culture at large. The Mexican American family in particular is likely to preserve more of its identity than have past immigrants. In contrast to previous groups of immigrants, Mexicans are not distancing themselves from their homeland by an ocean, thinking of the immigration experience as a completely new start in a new land. In fact many do not consider themselves immigrants at all. Many Mexican immigrants never completely sever their ties with the homeland, making many trips back and forth across the border. Mexico and everything that is familiar are just across an arbitrarily-drawn line in a cactus-strewn desert, or a narrow riverbed that is more often a dried-up creek. The proximity of friends and family helps preserve bonds that other immigrants are more likely to lose. This said, it is illuminating to understand the Mexican American family, how it works, its family values, and its adjustment to life in America.

Perhaps the most defining feature of the Mexican family is the importance placed on the family itself--familialism--an emphasis on loyalty, tradition, and strongly-knit family relationships. "Familialism" is defined by Webster as a pattern of social structure in which the family unit and strong family feeling occupy a position of great importance.¹ Moreover, standing in stark contrast to the ever-mobile Americans moving toward a job and away from their roots, Mexicans show a consistent preference for relying on extended family for support. It was once believed that this was a cultural pattern handed down from generation to generation; however, there is also support that it is a defensive measure against poverty. Family members rely heavily on each other for support in adapting to a meager existence.

Understanding the Mexican family is enlightening for a consideration of immigration because numerous studies have documented that migration is facilitated by kinship and social

La Familia

networks. Familialism helps the migrating families in that migrating family members often rely on already established family for housing and employment. This process is known as chain migration, in which previous immigrants facilitate the settlement of subsequent immigrants and family members. Relatives, friends, and *paisanos* (community members) may offer the potential immigrants housing, money loans, help in finding employment, and orientation in the community in which they settle.² Furthermore, once they have arrived in the United States, acquaintances from work or in social circles can provide them with further information about job opportunities and possible future destinations. This phenomenon is referred to as “social capital,” defined as “the access to jobs, housing, and financial assistance (and job information) provided by network members to new immigrants.”³ This “social capital” is an invaluable source of guidance and information for the Mexican family.

Common sense dictates that Mexicans cannot follow opportunities unless they know about them. A study of Central American and Mexican immigrants to Austin and San Antonio, Texas showed that they were employed within days of arrival due to network members’ provision of information about available jobs.⁴ In many cases, one contact from a source community serves as a network for many others from that community to find employment in the same place of business. This work specialization may mean that in one city many immigrants from a community will work in the restaurant and hotel industry, while in another highway construction, and in yet another location they may work the fields. The contacts and information provided by family, extended family and friends are instrumental in the decisions of where to go and what type of job to find. This networking also helps explain local clusterings of Mexican immigrants.

Religion is also a defining characteristic of the Mexican identity. The enormous faith exhibited by Mexican families speaks to a profound spiritual strength that lends perseverance to the hardships they endure. Mexico is by and large a Catholic country. Protestant groups, however, have been more active in proselytizing to Mexican Americans and supporting them in social-action projects than the Catholic church, thus creating substantial numbers of converts.

La Familia

The Catholicism that permeates the population finds its roots in folk beliefs and practices. *Curanderos(ras)* are folk healers who perform remedies and use their knowledge of medicinal herbs and folk religious beliefs to restore physical and mental health.⁵ Women often sustain the healing tradition. It is not a position that one can merely claim or study, but rather one of inheritance. A *curandero* or *curandera* must be born into a family of healers and undergo mentoring from a very early age. *Curanderismo* has virtually disappeared from Mexican American families; however, the renewed interest in natural and herbal remedies is also securing a renewed interest in *curanderismo*.⁶

La familia refers not just to the nuclear family but to the extended family as well, including brothers and sisters, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, and other blood relatives. The extended family structure is an important link between the family and community in Mexican American culture. *Compadrazgo* is a sort of “godparentism.” Mexican godparents accept the obligation to act as a guardian, help out financially when needed, and take over the role of parent in the event of death. *Parentesco* refers to a kinship concept that extends family sentiments to kin and also nonkin members of the community. This ensures a support system of reciprocity and also establishes a stronger sense of community among individuals who share the same regional or geographic origins.⁷ *Confianza*, or a strong sense of trust, respect, and intimacy, deepens the bonds of these relationships.

In contrast to Euro-American values that tend to embrace capitalist thinking and the progress of the individual, Mexicans place greater importance on the family. Selfishness is condemned, and even when there is barely enough to meet one’s own needs, Mexicans will share with other relatives. The Mexican family values the strength of relationships, even at great cost.

This family unity is threatened as trends in immigration change. Whereas Mexicans traditionally migrated toward rural settings, the current trend is to head for urban areas. Approximately 88% of Mexican immigrants to the United States are now migrating to urban areas.⁸ There is evidence to suggest that extended family patterns are being broken down by urbanization, and that Mexican American families are beginning to adopt the middle-class

La Familia

American custom of not expecting family members to support their relatives.⁹ One can hypothesize that the Mexican American family will take on a more Anglo flavor--smaller household composition and more spread apart families.

Mexican American families tend to be larger and younger than other families. The average household size of Mexican American families is significantly larger than for the rest of the American population: 4.1 compared to 3.8 for all Hispanics and 3.1 for non-Hispanics.¹⁰ Birth rates for Mexican women (2.85 children born/woman--1999 est.) average about 60% higher than the rest of the women in the population. Moreover, most migrants come between the ages of 20 and 30--presumably their most fertile years.

In Mexican culture marriage is encouraged and expected. Couples are more likely to marry and at a younger age than the rest of the population. The average Mexican male marries at 22.8 years, and females at 20.9 years. *Endogamy* (the practice of marrying within the same ethnic group) is standard for Mexican families.¹¹ Though premarital sex is strongly condemned, the high rates of teen pregnancy among girls of Mexican-descent show that it is now commonplace.

The socialization of Mexican children is distinct from that of other American children. The belief that they should be "seen and not heard" makes for a strict upbringing. There is great contrast between how boys and girls are treated, with boys being granted much more liberty and permissiveness to the boys. Boys are taught to be more masculine and given greater status than the girls, while the girls are expected to be feminine and demure.¹² This carries into defined roles as adults--the father as the unchallenged head of the household, and the mother as the nurturer, guide, and caretaker of the children. Assimilation and acculturation have had an impact on this Mexican characteristic. Female teenagers are more willing to challenge their submissive role and seek greater independence. However, defined gender roles are still encouraged and are important to the Mexican family.

Skin color is an important factor in the assimilation of Mexican families to an American culture where light-skinned people predominate. Hispanics fit neither the "black" nor the "white" category, making up a new category of "brown." Thus, the phrase "the browning of America"

La Familia

refers in part to the increasing Hispanic presence in the United States. Interestingly, Mexicans note a difference in how they are welcomed and treated by their varying degrees of brown. Montalvo reports a distinct difference between the experiences of light-skinned and dark-skinned individuals. Of the light-skinned Mexican Americans that he interviewed, many said that they rarely considered the color of their skin or that of their peers. They did not feel their skin color to be a factor in how they were treated by others. Conversely, their dark-skinned counterparts reported being acutely aware of their skin color and felt they were treated adversely because of it. Light-skinned Mexican Americans were apt to socialize with other light-skinned Hispanics, while the darker-skinned tended to socialize only with others who also had darker skin.¹³ Ethnic visibility seems to play a marked role in immigrants' acceptance into American culture. Even within the Hispanic culture itself, lighter-skinned youths chide their more visibly ethnic peers. The teasing is returned by the darker-skinned peers. The adolescents from each group will label each other with names such as "*pinon*" or "*biscochito*," nicknames that refer to the notion that someone is Mexican (or brown-skinned) on the outside and white (or Anglo) on the inside because he has adopted values and behaviors of the majority culture.¹⁴ As the White majority moves toward becoming a minority in the twenty-first century, the long-upheld value system based on skin color will likely shift colors or become a less regarded value.

Poverty continues to deepen the strain of Mexican families' attempts to assimilate. Out of the many subgroups of Hispanics, family income is the lowest in Mexican American families.¹⁵ Mexicans are also the subgroup with the lowest educational attainment, supporting the adage that the schoolhouse door is the path out of poverty. Mexican workers have historically worked in those employment sectors which are most prone to cyclical employment such as farm labor. As migrant workers they are employed only temporarily or seasonally. This is cause for long periods of unemployment and little to no benefits. These types of jobs offer miserable pay, long, grueling hours, and substandard living conditions. Illness is often perpetuated by the lack of health benefits. Furthermore, the need to constantly move toward a job also makes for a very inconsistent education for Mexican children, thereby increasing the odds that they, too, will only

La Familia

be qualified for similar types of work. Mexican Americans continue to remain highly overrepresented in manufacturing, operator, and service jobs.¹⁶

The Mexican American family is and will be an increasingly felt presence in the United States' progression into the twenty-first century. The Hispanic population is projected to become the largest ethnic group in the United States by the year 2020. Mexicans will account for more than 60% of that group. Indications are that Hispanics comprise the fastest-growing segment of the elderly population, and that this growth will continue into the year 2050.¹⁷ It is wise to consider what Americans and Mexican Americans have to learn from each other, and realize that neither group will go unaffected by the other. As John Donne perceptively stated, "no man is an island, entire of himself."

They're Coming to America

*The U.S. is the fifth-largest Hispanic country in the world,
in terms of population, after Mexico, Spain, Argentina, and Colombia.*

--Rev. Mario Vizcaino, head of the Roman Catholic
Church's Southeastern regional office for Hispanics in Miami

It sometimes seems as if America woke up in the 1970s to discover that a great migration of Hispanics had hopped in bed with her. Immigrants were more traditionally thought of as those who crossed great oceans to reach the United States. How does one recognize an incessant seeping in of untold millions? The country sleeps until it awakes in shock, mistaking the change as a sudden burst.

The Hispanic presence in the United States has a long history. Mexicans continued crossing the border back and forth for a century after the line was drawn. The territory was vast, and Mexicans were needed to farm the fertile land. Puerto Ricans flooded New York without raising much outcry. After all, they're U.S. citizens, and the mainland is a convenient pressure valve for the island's burgeoning population. Cubans filled Florida in the early 1960s, figuratively taking over Miami for themselves. Castro's shipment of 125,000 Cubans in the spring and summer of 1980 arrived in Mariel harbor, made up of the poor, the insane, the unskilled, and the criminal of Cuban society. This invasion had the devastating effect of allowing an America that had never *seen* Hispanics slipping across the border to capture on TV the reality of the numbers.¹

Suddenly Americans stopped looking at each group individually and began to see the big picture: a large and quickly-growing Hispanic presence. In reality, Hispanics have been here longer than the Anglos. It was the Spanish who laid claim to the Southwest, California, Florida, the far side of the Mississippi up to the Great Lakes and the Rockies. Ponce de Leon discovered and named Florida. Cabeza de Vaca discovered the Gulf of California, reaching Mexico City in

They're Coming to America

1536. Francisco Vasquez de Coronado searched out New Mexico and Hernando de Soto rode from Tampa across the south and the Mississippi into Kansas and Oklahoma.²

Proximity creates an intertwined history. The United States of America and the United Mexican States are divided by a border that causes cartographers to scratch their heads in confusion. There are far more logical river and mountain formations on which to structure a political divide both north and south of the Rio Grande. And that is precisely what the border is --a *political* divide. The border parts us neither economically nor socially, merely politically. Border towns in the U.S. could well be mistaken for those in Mexico. Mexican music springs forth from the *cantinas* (Mexican bars), and Spanish is spoken in open-air markets in El Paso, Texas and Nogales, Arizona.

What the border does do is give Americans a place to say "our laws start here." Unfortunately, the U.S. has a long history now of creating ineffective immigration legislation and not properly supporting it. Mexicans have made a mockery of our laws--and the U.S. has allowed it. The United States made a practice early on of finding loopholes to bend the law in its favor when it suffered from labor shortages, desperately needing able-bodied Mexicans to take up the slack. However, as soon as the labor force was saturated, the U.S. was quick to deport them back en masse. This sent a clear message to the Mexicans: U.S. immigration laws are a matter of convenience.

For too long lawmakers seemed to think that the existence of the law was enough. In reality, nothing short of a two thousand mile human wall would keep eager Mexican workers and family members out. So long as there are the hungry and the jobless, no law will keep them on one side of a border when employers are waiting to hire them on the other.

A sort of global communism or globally-unified political will, equally spreading among the population wealth, natural resources, access to education, food, health care and so on, might be the only situation in which push and pull factors would cease to exist. Not only will this never happen, it would be unsustainable if it did happen. The fact of the matter is that the world

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is not an egalitarian place. Human ambition, greed, power-lust, disparity of talent, opportunity and resources create an increasing polarization between the haves and the have-nots.

Before discussing the push and pull factors present today, it is illuminating to also understand the historical comings and goings of Mexicans to this country. The current immigration debate, talk of labor struggles, and U.S.-Mexico relations are all best understood in light of the last century and a half. In some cases, this history is not a pretty one, showing a capitalist country benefiting greatly from a labor force that was easy to get--and easy to get rid of. One thing is certain: Mexicans have played an important part in the economic growth of the United States.

The role of the Mexican laborer is both economic and political. Mexicans have come in easy supply when the U.S. gave the first hint of need, serving as an economic dose of vitamin C whenever the U.S. labor force needed extra padding. This was also helpful politically to the Mexican government as it ameliorated the intense pressure of high unemployment and poverty while weakening the chance of social uprising.

The "our land--your land" mentality between the Americans and Mexicans is analogous to that between the European Americans and Native Americans. Euro-Americans boldly took land in their colonizing days with a mentality that seemed to declare, "if you fight for it and win, you deserve the land." Mexicans inhabited the Southwest until the U.S. government provoked the expropriation of nearly half of Mexico during the Mexican-American war.

There were probably fewer than 100,000 Mexicans living in the Southwest when the U.S. invaded Mexico and seized half its territory in 1846. Approximately 160,000 Apache Indians, who had a historical hatred for the Mexicans, lived there as well. The Apache presence served as a sort of border patrol itself in an otherwise open border. Once American settlement largely contained the Indians, it enabled the Mexicans to travel safely across the border to fill the demand for seasonal crop labor.

In post-Civil War America the economic transition was from a free-market economy, allowing widespread competition among the small and medium-sized businesses, to one

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dominated by large banks and industry requiring foreign expansion for their prosperity. Mexican laborers were a necessary reserve for American labor needs. "Their presence, availability for employment, use as strikebreakers (scabs), or labor pool additions has served, in effect, to hold down the average wage level of American labor, to intimidate labor unions, and in general to help maintain labor discipline."³ Mexicans have also been particularly useful in times when the U.S. excluded the Chinese immigrants in 1882 or limited Japanese immigration in 1907. Mexicans were a necessary labor force taking shape beyond the realm of seasonal labor, taking whatever jobs they could get.

The Mexican revolution pushed more than a million immigrants northward in the years between 1910 and 1920. The border was still open, and they were eager to escape the oppressive dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. Too, there were many outlets for their labor--in agriculture, the garment and electronics industries, select sectors of heavy industry such as automotive and steel, and the restaurant, hotel, and other service industries.

Then the change came. "Until 1917, illegal immigration was a term virtually unknown in the American lexicon."⁴ On February 5, 1917, Congress overrode President Wilson's veto and created the first immigration restriction with real impact. The blow was aimed at the Italians and Slavs, who accounted for much of the influx of immigrants during the turn and early part of the century. They were considered part of the "undesirables." There was no great effect on Hispanics as a whole. To Mexicans, however, the law was the first of many they were to see the U.S. government manipulate back and forth in its favor.

And it didn't take long. The United States entered World War I in May, only two months after the law went into effect. Rumors that Mexicans would be drafted into the U.S. army swept the country, causing enough fear to send them home in droves. Their absence, coupled with the draft of American workers, created a serious labor shortage. The U.S. needed a quick solution and began desperately searching the law for loopholes. It found one that allowed for temporary admission of "otherwise inadmissible aliens."⁵ Needless to say, the

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Mexicans turned on their heels to head north again. The U.S. sighed in relief, and the crops were harvested.

The 1920s were a boom period for the U.S. economy, and the demand for labor remained high. Quotas didn't restrict the number of immigrants from the Western hemisphere, and the Mexicans were happy to keep coming. The Mexican government was happy to send them while it sat back and licked its wounds after a decade of revolution. In fact, it encouraged immigration, running trains from the heart of the country to the border. Times were good.

The Great Depression struck abruptly in the 1930s. The soaring unemployment caused the U.S. government to deport masses of Mexicans back to Mexico--including ones who had a legal right to be here. Not only was this deportation an embarrassment for the Mexican government, it was an unwelcome return of hundreds of thousands of mouths to feed during already hard times. Mexico resented the United States' fickleness and vowed that the next time U.S. need for labor arose "things would be different."

On December 9, 1941 the attack on Pearl Harbor rocked the nation, securing the inevitability of U.S. participation in World War II. The U.S. entered the war in 1942, drafting workers out of their jobs and into fatigues. The "next time" had come, and America found herself in another labor crisis. The two governments began negotiations and came up with the foundation of the "bracero" program. This was America's attempt to institutionalize her need for a continuous supply of seasonal Mexican labor. Although the bracero program was an imperfect system, it worked well enough to stay in effect for the next twenty years.

Operation Wetback

The so-called 'wetback' problem no longer exists.

The border has been secured.

--INS annual report, 1955

The problem with the bracero program was that the opportunity for legalization attracted too many immigrants. Over the 22 years that the program was in effect, 4.8 million Mexicans came to work legally. In that same period 5 million illegals were arrested by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.¹ There simply were not enough jobs for everyone who wanted to come.

During the Eisenhower administration the INS came up with a different strategy. General Joseph Swing, the new head of the INS, opted to expand the bracero program to make it easier for workers to enter legally. Simultaneously, he would use force to crack down on illegal immigration. He created a Special Mobile Force Operation with planes and jeeps to locate undocumented workers. "Operation Wetback," so named because of the wet backs of Mexicans crossing through the Rio Grand, worked beautifully for five years. Many Mexicans went south to avoid apprehension by the INS, and the numbers of illegals caught kept declining. It almost seemed as if the border were a controllable divide.

About five years later the decade-long downward trend began to reverse itself, and immigration was once again on the rise. President Kennedy didn't live to see the immigration laws reformed and modernized, but this was also an important issue to President Johnson, who raised the issue once again in his State of the Union address in 1964. Congress took their cue and discussed the issue throughout 1965, debating back and forth the pros and cons of ceilings on hemispheric migration. The ceiling proposed a 120,000 per hemisphere cap on Eastern and Western Hemisphere immigration. The bill was hotly debated. The fear of overpopulation and an emphasis on self-preservation dominated one side of the debate, while the other side pointed out the unrealistically low

Operation Wetback

caps and surety of an increase in illegal immigration. Nevertheless, the bill passed the House and Senate and was signed into law by President Johnson on October 3, 1965. It would go into effect on July 1, 1968.

The critics of the law proved correct. Illegal migration numbers continued to rise. Vietnamese boat people came, Haitians arrived in Florida, and the Cuban flood into Mariel harbor heightened the severity of the situation. The *New York Times* reported in December of 1980 that more newcomers entered the U.S. in the 1970s than in any other decade in U.S. history. Public opinion grew increasingly frustrated with the number of uninviteds.

The 1980s marked exhausting debate concerning bills posed by Alan Simpson (R-Wy), Romano Mazzoli (D-Ky.), and Peter Rodino (D-N.J.). After six years of battling the Simpson-Rodino bill around without enough support to push it all the way through the legislative process, President Reagan finally signed it into law on November 6, 1986.

Essentially, the issue of immigration rocked Congress for six years while the nation waited desperately for a solution to an increasingly permeable border. The bill, in its final stages, seemed to be carried to passage merely on the consensus that something had to be done. Though none was really sure what the best solution would be, one thing was unanimous: the “wetback” problem still existed. The border had not been secured.

The Tortilla Curtain*

*Mexican migrant workers' nickname for the high wire fence constructed along the border during the Carter administration.

Make a run for the border!

--Much heeded advice from Taco Bell

According to legend, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI aides once sent their boss a memorandum with margins too thin for his liking. In big red letters Hoover scrawled an angry warning across the top: "Watch the borders!" The next morning his startled staff transferred 200 FBI agents to Canada and Mexico.

Such a message today, if misunderstood, would bring exasperation and an incredulous sigh. The Mexican border is at historic heights of scrutiny and surveillance. The next step in security would be a two-thousand mile long human wall.

With the sheer volume of people who cross the border, one might imagine it as relatively easy to get across. To those who are strangers to the border, crossing it in some places is something of a spectacle. In the region between Tijuana and San Diego, for example, Border Patrol helicopters sweep the air all night with their spotlights canvassing the area. Dodge trucks speed in and out of the landscape patrolling with flashlights, guns, and dogs. Huge flood lights now illuminate the terrain that once hid immigrants. Powerful night-scopes that can pick out a figure over a mile away highlight people, showing up as a minuscule dot on a scope. A computer keeps track of more than 400 motion sensors buried along the border. It revealed that the smugglers made most of their runs during B.P. shift changes, causing the Patrol to stagger their relief time. The Patrol has also computerized its identification system. Fingerprints and photos of each immigrant allow agents to build cases against *coyotes*, thus reducing the availability of money-hungry guides with an invaluable, intimate knowledge of the terrain.¹

And still they keep coming. California's Interstate 5, which is nearest the Mexican border, is sometimes so congested with pedestrians that it resembles a town square. Imagine a center

The Tortilla Curtain

island, and running down the length of the island is a cement wall. If the Mexicans are walking north and a border patrol car comes along, they simply hop over the wall and start walking south. The officer has to drive up to the interchange, swing over the overpasses, then drive south. Depending on where this pursuit begins, this detour could entail 5 to 10 miles of driving. When the officer finally reaches the group, they hop over the wall and go north. To try to do a freeway arrest is too dangerous, so the border patrol basically throw up their hands in surrender.²

What is left out of this description is the poverty, violence, or political fear that first drives these people to leave loved ones and everything they know to come hundreds or thousands of miles across territory utterly unknown to them. They face police corruption, violence in the forms of beatings, rape, murder, torture, road accidents, theft, and incarceration on top of the fear, exhaustion, hunger, thirst, and loneliness. Local gangs easily identify people making the trek toward the border and prey on the travelers, robbing them of their money. *Coyotes* are men who are paid to help them navigate a way across into the canyons where there are breaks in the wire fence. *Coyotes* often times take all the immigrants' money in exchange for this service, but will run at the first sight of a gang or border patrol officer.

If the immigrants are lucky enough to get past all of this, they face I-5. The freeway is 10 lanes, 5 in each direction with vehicles going 60 miles an hour. So many people trying to cross have been killed or injured that the state has put up orange caution signs with a man, woman, and child fleeing across. And then there are some California drivers who actually speed up as immigrants run across. However, if they make it, men in nice clothes are waiting on the other side to point them to Los Angeles, San Bernardino, or San Francisco where business is good.³

Only about half of the illegal population gets here this way. The other half come to the United States legally on a temporary visa and then later become unauthorized aliens because they overstay their visa. Thus, it's really a misguided strategy to think the solution is simply a matter of beefing up border patrol.

The Tortilla Curtain

On May 28, 1924, the Department of Labor Appropriation Act provided for the permanent establishment of a "Border Patrol." The Border Patrol is responsible for performing their duties along roughly 8,000 miles of international boundaries. They work in automobiles, boats, aircraft and afoot. There is a unique service in the national law enforcement, marked by days and often months of dull, routine patrol that is at times marked with urgent action and danger.⁴

The Mexican border is long and varied. The border extends eastward from San Ysidro, California through mountains, deserts, canyons, and rich agricultural lands for 1,945 miles to the Gulf of Mexico. In certain parts the border is a barely discernible line between concrete boundary markers in an uninhabited desert country, and in others it is divided by a large steel fence--the classic, manmade way to say "Keep Out!" Parts of the border divide thriving border towns on both sides, such as Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico. In other places, the Rio Grande separates these cities. From El Paso, Texas to the Gulf of Mexico, the Rio Grande adds roughly 500 miles to the length of the border. This boundary is at times easily-crossed dry river beds, and at other times it is full of raging torrents.⁵

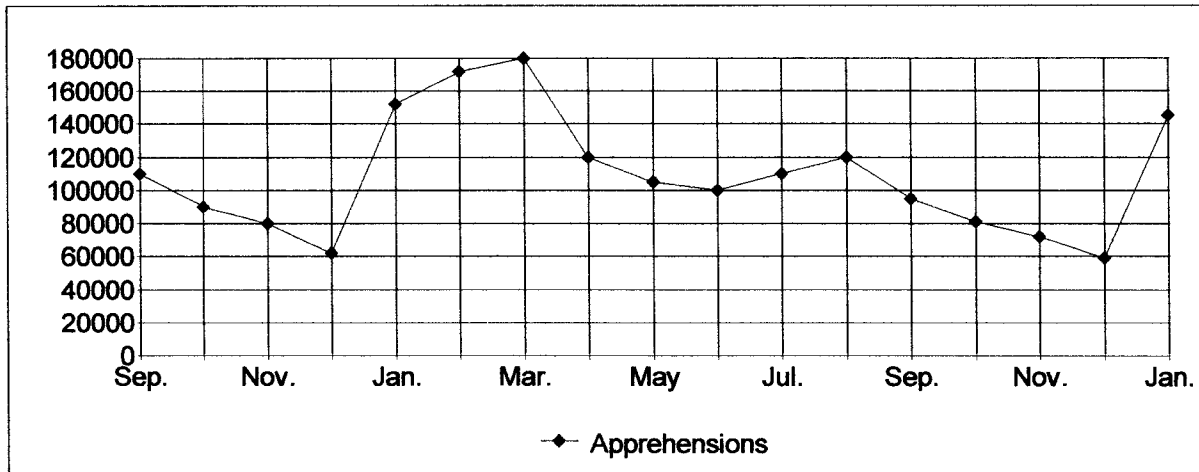
The mission of today's Border Patrol is to protect the boundaries of the United States by preventing illegal entry, and by detecting, interdicting, and apprehending illegal aliens, smugglers, and contraband. This is a multifaceted task requiring detection through many venues. In order to prevent and detect illegal entry, the Patrol scourges the border by land, sea, and air. Apprehending smugglers involves doing traffic checks, checking public transportation, and patrolling the interior (areas over 25 miles from the border). The Border Patrol assists the Investigations and Inspections staff by checking employers for illegal workers, visiting local jails or state prisons to interview aliens, and identifying alien smugglers.⁶

For decades, the Border Patrol's enforcement strategy was to apprehend illegals after they had illegally entered the United States. This involved locating stations along the border and in the immediate border area as well as stations throughout the U.S. in cities with high concentrations of illegals. Recently, the B.P. took on a new approach: preventive medicine. Rather than merely

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apprehending illegals after they had entered, the Patrol decided they would try to deter them from entering in the first place. The new strategy is to concentrate agents on the border to raise illegals' risk of apprehension to a maximum level and thereby deter illegal smugglers from attempting to enter.

Southwest Border Total Apprehensions: September 1996-January 1998



Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service

* Normally, apprehensions reach a yearly low in December followed by a strong increase in January. Seasonal highs tend to be reached in early spring. Apprehensions fluctuate between summer months and then start their autumn decline in September.

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 allowed for increasing the resources for the Border Patrol so as to help stem the flow of illegal aliens crossing the Southwest Border. The act allowed for increases of not less than 1,000 agents each year from 1995 to 1998. These new agents are trained in the philosophy of "prevention through deterrence."⁷

In 1994 the federal government spent \$50 million building a 14-mile-long fence between San Diego county and Tijuana, and added a thousand border patrol agents to the area in a project dubbed "Operation Gatekeeper." Just as with "Operation Wetback" forty years earlier, the effort was met with praises and apparent success. However, as true numbers emerged, it became evident that the effort did little to staunch the northward flow. At best it merely pushed the stream of people 10 to 15 miles eastward.⁸ More than this, it pushed up the fees among the *coyotes*, who now charge up to \$500 per trip.

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For every immigrant caught, others slip through. Consider “Juan” (or Pedro or Carlos or Maria for that matter). He crossed the border from Tijuana five times in one week, and was reluctantly sent back each time. “And then the sixth time we made it,” he said. Now he lives with his aunt in a suburb of Los Angeles. He makes \$20 a day painting houses, compared to the \$3 a day he made in Mexico. He sends some of the money home to his mother and brothers and sisters in Morelos. “I came here because I needed to work.” He was hired on the street by contractors who don’t ask too many questions.⁹

In the border town of Tijuana is *Casa del Migrante* (House of the Migrant), one of the few temporary shelters for those making the trek between Mexico and the U.S. Hopeful migrants say they do worry about the dangers of crossing the border and finding their way in a new country, but that the risks are far preferable to the sure fate of poverty at home.¹⁰ One could easily claim that borders only work when the grass isn’t greener on the other side.

The Mexican-American border is more protected today than at any other point in its history. Yet the numbers of illegal entrants do not reflect this beefed-up protection. They defy it. Hope continues to be a more poignant force than fear of the border itself, the forces attempting to seal it, or what lies ahead on the other side.

Drugs

Seventy percent of the illegal drugs entering the United States comes through Mexico.

--Drug Enforcement Administration

Mexico takes the heat when the discussion turns to drugs. After all, Mexico is the principal venue of drug traffic into the United States. Colombia is the main supplier. Yet the finger pointing usually stops there, leaving out the enabling culprit in this trilateral crime. The United States is the primary consumer. "Without U.S. demand, there would be no Colombian production or Mexican intermediation. Yet it is supply that is satanized while demand is almost sanctified."¹

Culiacan is in the drug-rich coastal state of Sinaloa, through which most of the migrants, exports, and cocaine headed for the U.S. pass. It is a city of 600,000, nicknamed "Little Chicago" by Mexican reporters. It averages several drug-related murders daily.² Civilians carry handguns as a normal accessory of their everyday attire.

The drug culture is very much a *culture*. The music, way of life, and even religion reflect the prominence of the drug trade. "The most popular religious site in Culiacan is a shrine dedicated to Jesus Malverde, a common criminal hanged in 1909, who is now known as 'El Narcosanton'--the Narco Saint."³ This is the shrine that draws drug lords to come and pray for good fortune. The construction and materials disregard established aesthetics. The shrine is built of plate glass, white bathroom tiles, and corrugated sheet metal; the coverings include blue spray paint, tar, and cheap wallpaper. None of the walls completely join the sheet-metal roof. The setting is far from religious as well. The shrine is situated between two parking lots and obscured by a taco stand.

The drug trade is certainly not the only opportunity for great social mobility in Mexico. However, it is a flourishing multibillion-dollar business that provides another opportunity for those with ambition. In fact, narcotics sales are too prolific to be

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dismissed as “illegal.” “Even if legal business is growing and helping to create a solid middle class, the drug trade is the heart of the Mexican economy.”⁴ Yet the drug culture is not merely a defining characteristic of Mexico’s economy. The United States shares in the profit with drug dealers who pocket 75 cents of every narcodollar made in the United States.⁵ The industry is a part of North American free trade that needs no congressional contracts or suave political support. It is a simple matter of supply and demand. “The narcotics trade indicates as much about the social fiber of the United States (where the market is) as about Mexico, where young men on the make are responding to consumer demand in ways that both challenge and further corrupt an already imploding political power structure.”⁶

Two major sources of revenue for Mexico--drug profits and the wages sent back by illegal aliens--result from the major activities that Washington claims it wants to stop. Though these are crimes, they are currently necessary sources of revenue in order to maintain stability in Mexico. Without the drug trade and illegal migration, the struggles of Mexico’s economy would likely be amplified to the point of inciting Washington’s greater fear: revolution in Mexico and chaos on the border. Mexico’s central authority is already weak. Their economy is fragile at best. Elimination of Mexico’s largest sources of income at this point in time could cause more havoc than would justify the cessation of illegal activity. “Indeed, by supporting the Mexican economy, America’s appetite for marijuana and cocaine protects against a further flood of immigrants from a contiguous, troubled, and ever more populous Third World country.”⁷

Language

*Discrimination had entered our lives because of language,
so language became an important symbol of civil rights denied.*

--Anthony Alvarado, former New York school chancellor

No discussion of immigration can proceed for very long before someone pipes up about the language issue. Perhaps the greatest fear of all concerning an invasion of people who are very different from the United States norm is not just the difference in race, religion, and social class, but the fact that they can walk in U.S. grocery stores and marketplaces communicating in a foreign tongue. Language barriers often expose xenophobia, as evidenced by many U.S. citizens who stand by their mantra: "If they're gonna come here they better speak *our* language!" But the United States has no official language. More importantly, attempts to declare an official language suggest that doing so could be found unconstitutional.

Because the United States currently has no official language, we might wonder how we have managed this far without one, and why the issue is gaining importance. At the risk of repeating a little history, the current push for language laws only becomes clearer with a quick review of the different waves of immigrants. Remember that until the 1930s immigration was largely a European phenomenon. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the United States accepted waves of immigrants simply to fill the demand for labor needed here. The first mass movement occurred from the 1840s until the 1870s and brought a predominantly English-speaking wave of people from the British Isles and another group from the nation-states that were later combined to form Germany. "They came with cultural, legal, political, and social values compatible with the customs and institutions already flourishing here."¹ A second wave of immigrants came from southern and eastern Europe. They were predominantly Catholic, coming to a Protestant nation, and they spoke neither English nor a Germanic language. The newcomers assimilated, often moving to urban areas and working in labor-intensive industries such as

manufacturing. However, the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant was already an established norm, and immigrants recognized the direct relationship between assimilation and social mobility.

The Mexican immigrants coming today have ethnic and social differences that present new challenges. They share characteristics with Blacks who moved from the poor, rural South in earlier decades. "They have roots in rural areas or small towns and leave their homes because of poverty; they have little formal education and bring few skills and little capital with them."² Just as Blacks did, they face discrimination because of their darker skin color. They are geographically very close to home, and they often come to the U.S. with the mindset that they can return once they have saved enough money or if their situation does not work out here. Because of this mindset, their family and social ties typically remain unbroken. They inherently bring their culture with them, creating no great urgency to assimilate as have other immigrants.

They differ from the Black migrants in that they come from "a very structured society with strong cultural and national identities, reflecting Mayan, Aztec, and Spanish language heritage spanning many centuries."³ A deep tradition of Catholicism is intertwined in the culture. Furthermore, their Spanish language further separates them from the native population here.

Previous groups of immigrants were breaking ties with family, land, and culture to come to the United States and weave a part of themselves into the multicultural tapestry. "Because Mexican immigrants typically consider the border a nuisance more than a barrier--with many people frequently moving back and forth--they tend to maintain strong links with their former homes and their national identity, and hence show a lower rate of citizenship acquisition than that found among other groups."⁴ Whereas other groups of immigrants did not come in such numbers or congregate so uniformly, Mexicans have become a defining cultural presence in the southwestern United States. Their common culture and Spanish language unify them, and because of their sheer numbers, many businesses have accommodated them rather than forcing them to learn English.

Carl Rowan, a nationally syndicated columnist of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, writes passionately against "English only" legislation and the underlying fear and racism that spurs it. He

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writes, "While most of us were expressing relief that, by a narrow margin, the people of Quebec voted not to secede from Canada and form a separate French-speaking nation, House Speaker Newt Gingrich was discovering a frightening new reason to pass a foolish, divisive law making English the 'official' language of the United States."⁵ He has interpreted Gingrich to imply that we could soon face hordes of Spanish-speakers calling for the secession of California or Texas and that our best defense is to pass "English-only" legislation. Gingrich is not alone in his belief that forcing newcomers to speak English would unify America. There is a clearly growing sentiment that English needs to be the *official* language.

The intensity of this sentiment is not so much *for* English as it is *against* the growing prominence of Spanish. But the freedom to speak in whichever language seems to be understood as so basic that it is not even addressed in the Constitution. "A democracy is not supposed to tell its citizens how to talk--which may explain the Founders' 'oversight' when it came to mandating an official tongue."⁶ Ironically, the worry that surrounds the slipping status of English in the United States comes at a time when English continues to spread as a global language. It is the undisputed medium of international business, science, and statecraft. Moreover, all available evidence shows that today's immigrants are learning English faster than ever before.⁷

According to Hispanic leaders, the spread and acceptance of the Spanish language will not be halted by anti-bilingual education efforts or a push for "English-only" legislation. In a survey of Hispanic leaders done by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute and Public Agenda, the Institute writes that, "their burgeoning numbers will be accompanied by increased political clout and growing acceptance of Spanish as the second most important language in the United States."⁸

Two important bills specifically addressing the constitutionality of "English-only" legislation are currently running through Congress. The first, H.R. 50, sponsored by Representative Bob Stump, was introduced January 6, 1999. He proposed a Declaration of Official Language Act of 1999 that would declare English to be the official language of the U.S. government. It also states that English is the preferred language of communication among U.S. citizens. It would require the U.S. government to promote and support use of English for

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communications among U.S. citizens, and also require communications by officers of the U.S. government with U.S. citizens to be in English.⁹

An important section specifically applies to immigrants. Whereas immigrants have historically been accepted as citizens upon completion of a test (in whichever language), this bill would direct the Immigration and Naturalization Service to enforce the established English language proficiency standard for all applicants for U.S. citizenship. Furthermore, all naturalization ceremonies would be conducted entirely in English. Never before has the United States lost sight of her multicultural heritage in such a way as to force a single language so immediately upon her newcomers.

This bill also calls for a repeal of the Bilingual Education Act (title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) and amends the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to repeal bilingual voting requirements. It was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce on January 6, 1999. On January 22, it was referred to the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families. Since February 25, it has been in a Subcommittee on the Constitution.

The second bill, H.J. RES. 21, introduced by Doolittle in a joint resolution, proposes an amendment to the Constitution of the United States establishing English as the official language of the United States. An amendment to the Constitution requires passage by a two-thirds vote in both the Senate and House of Representatives, as well as ratification by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States within seven years after the date of its submission for ratification.¹⁰

Section One states, "English language shall be the official language of the United States. As the official language, the English language shall be used for all public acts including every order, resolution, vote or election, and for all records and judicial proceedings of the Government of the United States and the government of the several states."¹¹ The second section merely states that Congress and the states shall enforce this article by appropriate legislation. Currently this bill also sits in the Subcommittee on the Constitution.

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The Supreme Court has yet to address the constitutionality of the bill. They have, however, dealt a temporary setback to the push for English as the official language of government. State voters in Arizona adopted the United States' strictest English-only law in 1988. In April of 1998, the state supreme court struck this law down unanimously. On January 11, 1999, Supreme Court Justices left this decision intact without explanation.¹²

Demanding English as an *official* language seems to be more a slap in the face than a real encouragement toward assimilation. Debates on the house floor on whether to allow Puerto Ricans to vote to make Puerto Rico the 51st U.S. state, remain a U.S. territory, or an independent nation, show that we are willing to tread on basic human rights to insure language assimilation. The former Spanish colony has been a U.S. possession since the end of the Spanish-American war in 1898. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, but have only one delegate in Congress (without a voting right), and they cannot vote in U.S. elections. The bill proposed the 3.8 million citizens in Puerto Rico be given the right to determine their own future--an opportunity kept from them for one hundred years now. Yet passage of the bill was threatened by those in Congress who "insisted English should be the Spanish-speaking island's only official language if it gains U.S. statehood."¹³ This amendment, presented by New York Republican Gerald Solomon, would also require Puerto Rican schools to teach in English. Solomon reasoned that "a state requires the assimilation of a territory within the union of states and language differences are the number one barrier to actual assimilation."¹⁴ Supporters of the bill pointed to Hawaii and New Mexico as examples of Solomon's fallacious reasoning and the narrow-mindedness of the amendment. Both states have two official languages.

Though the Supreme Court has not directly addressed the constitutionality of declaring an official language, there are clues to how it might respond from a previous decision of a related issue. In 1971, non-English-speaking Chinese students brought a class suit against officials in the San Francisco public school system. They were seeking relief against the unequal educational opportunities that they believed violated the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1971 the San Francisco school system was integrated, and 2,856 Chinese students who did not speak English were

included. Of this number, about 1,000 were given supplemental courses in English, while about 1,800 were not. The Court had four basic points to support their decision that the school system was negligent in their educational provisions. First, the California Education Code states that “English shall be the basic language of instruction in all schools.”¹⁵ Second, that section also states that it is “the policy of the state” to insure “the mastery of English by all pupils in schools.” Third, the Education Code requires all students who receive a diploma of graduation from grade 12 to meet a standard of proficiency in English. And fourth, the Code also states that children between the ages of six and 16 years are “subject to compulsory full-time education.”¹⁶

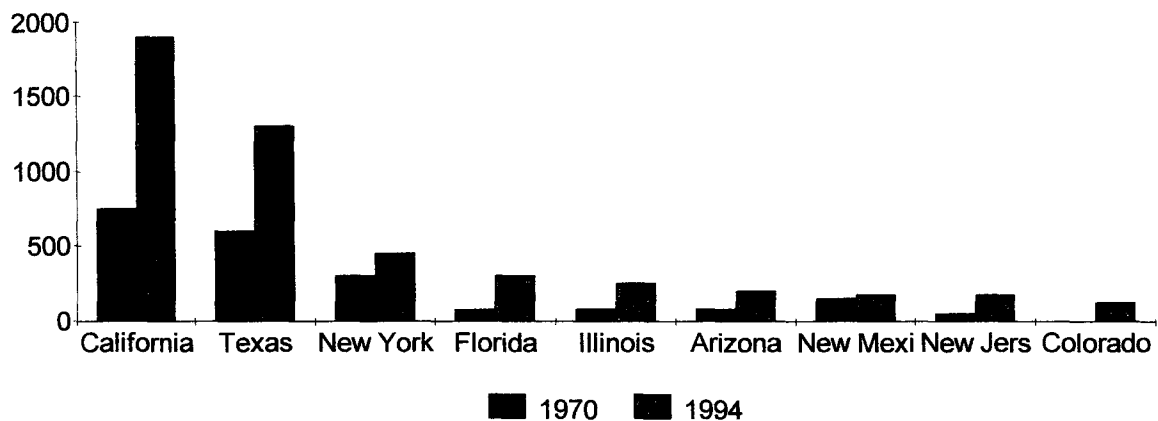
Justice Douglas delivered the opinion of the Court, joined by Brennan, Marshall, Powell, and Rehnquist. Justices Stewart, Burger, Blackmun, and White filed opinions concurring with the result. Justice Douglas writes, “Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education. We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful.”¹⁷

Although the Justices have not applied this same conclusion to the broader question of requiring English in all levels of society, one could extrapolate that they might feel that a law mandating all U.S. citizens to be proficient in one common language is to make a mockery of what it means to be American. This is not to say that individuals will not miss the fullest participation in business, government, and politics among other things if they cannot communicate in the majority language. But is it really ideal to require proficiency in English upon naturalization and deny a period of assimilation that has been a privilege of all past immigrants? Based on the Supreme Court’s tendency to favor more protection over less and the history of compassionate immigration laws encouraged by the Declaration of Independence, declaring English as the official language of the U.S. is likely to be found unconstitutional. A Milwaukee journalist puts it bluntly: “There is no need for this legislation; it serves no useful purpose. Its true significance is to

proclaim: 'We're Americans; you're not. You want to be an American, you'd better talk like us, dress like us and think like us.'"¹⁸

So, what's the answer? If America continues into the twenty-first century with no official language, what is to become of the growing non-English speaking populace? The key to unlocking language barriers is in our schools, the institutions responsible for churning out citizens who have the skills to participate in society.

Growth In Thousands of Latino Enrollments, 1970-1994
States with more than 100,000 Latino Students



Source: DBS Corp., 1882; 1987; 1991-92 NCES Common Core of Data Public Education Agency Universe; 1994-95 NCES Common Core Data School Universe; Harvard Project on Desegregation

As the *Lau v. Nichols* decision emphasized, the educational experience must be comprehensible in order to be meaningful. It is fundamental that foreign-tongued children are taught in their native language, taught English, or taught in such a way that incorporates the two. There are only two other options. One would be not to require school attendance for children who do not know English, creating an uneducated class of children with dismal prospects for the future and a greater propensity to join gangs or engage in juvenile crime. The other option is to dump foreign-tongued kids into mainstream, English-speaking classrooms, creating a nightmare for teachers, retarding the pace of the classes, and pushing the vast majority of non-English

Language

speakers to drop out of school (with the same consequences as the first option). Clearly these options are not really options.

History shows that poor school performance is rooted in poverty and in language barriers. Both are endemic qualities of Mexican children in the United States. Until the 1960s, the approach to teaching Spanish speakers in public schools was a method known as submersion. It is the second option described above: placing students in English-only classes, forbidding them to speak Spanish, and expecting them to learn English on a sink-or-swim basis. It was a cruel method to take a six or seven-year-old who had grown up hearing nothing but Spanish at home and then put him or her in a classroom buzzing with foreign sounds and strange words. “Pleas for help were ignored, and as late as the 1950s children who spoke Spanish were made to kneel on upturned bottle caps, forced to hold bricks in outstretched hands in the schoolyard, or told to put their nose in a chalk circle drawn on a blackboard.”¹⁹ Amazingly, this would happen in towns where 98 percent of the townspeople were Spanish-speaking.

Submersion only worked for the few academically-gifted students. The rest of the students sank behind, struggling to make sense of the lessons. All were scarred by the experience of sitting in linguistic darkness.

Based on decades of different programs and experiments, the solution seems to be bilingual education. Initially, bilingual education was a response to the alarming numbers surrounding Hispanic children’s education. These children had a dropout rate far higher than Blacks’; on a national average, Hispanics had 7.1 years of schooling while Blacks had 9 years. There were surveys that showed that half the Mexican-Americans in Texas were functionally illiterate and had less than a fifth-grade education. Many of the Hispanics were pushed into “mentally retarded” classrooms because they could not keep up in mainstream classes. These children made up 40 percent of the “mentally retarded.” In addition, Hispanics scored significantly lower on standard IQ tests. Bilingual education seemed to be best way to teach English without compromising the degree of understanding necessary to make the educational experience successful.

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Bilingual education came in the form of many different programs in the 1960s. One program combined a classroom half-filled with Anglos and half-filled with Hispanics. Half a day's instruction was in English, half in Spanish. Started at Coral Way Elementary School in 1963, this program quickly became a model. "English as a Second Language," or ESL, is still popular today. It teaches English to foreign-speakers in the same way that French or German is taught, as a regular part of a school's curriculum. A program called "Spanish S" was designed to give Spanish-speakers the degree of fluency they would have acquired at home.

The bilingual debate came to be about which method is better--to graduate students who are fluent in both English and Spanish, or to transition children from Spanish to English. The difficulty in the question lies in the value placed on knowing two languages versus one--and if only one, which one? Fluency in English is a ticket to upward mobility in the United States, but that in and of itself does not guarantee success. Many Mexican children too often lack the skills needed to make it here. A second language is not a substitute for those skills, nor do well-paid bricklayers or construction workers have much need for a second language. Ironically, doctors, lawyers, and teachers often do not have a solid command of Spanish. It makes sense for Mexicans (and Americans, for that matter) on the social rise to know both languages well. For others, fluency in one language is essential. Which language that may be depends on the person.

In the seventies, weak legislation and disagreement over which programs were successful caused a downward turn against bilingual education. Bilingualism had a popularity to it that was bolstered by ample financing, eager lobbyists in Washington, and more and more Hispanic children who were eligible for the programs. The *Lau* decision and the 1974 Bilingual Education Act were important decisions in favor of the non-English speakers. The "Lau remedies," as they came to be known, were a set of guidelines to standardize the task of arranging separate agreements with hundreds of individual school districts. Bilingual education had to be offered wherever at least twenty students with a common language other than English were found. This was enforced with the threat of withdrawing federal funds if the students were not accommodated.

Language

The eighties offered an array of opinions about bilingual education. One study, commissioned by the government to prove that bilingual education worked, had less than pleasing results. The research, conducted by the American Institute for Research (AIR), looked at 11,500 children exposed to bilingual education and concluded that it does not necessarily work. Critics of the report argued that the study merely demonstrated that the good programs were canceled out by the bad ones. Moreover, the scientific methodologies were weak at best.

Nevertheless, a growing disenchantment with bilingual education replaced the unassailable optimism of the previous decade. What remains in this decade is the assurance that bilingual education is viable. However, the debate over its value, function, and effectiveness continues.

Perhaps the best conclusion is that bilingual education is necessary, but not in a form that can be mandated by the federal government. Thoughtful proponents of bilingual education take the stance that good programs are often a combination of many techniques. Methods have to be adapted to what gets results from the students. Teachers must be flexible and able to meet the students' needs. Each school system is better served when left to assess its own best solution, whether that be structured immersion, ESL, or a combination of programs.

The bottom line is that bilingual education works. To what degree is arguable, but it does help Spanish speakers learn some English. Moreover, it keeps them from dropping out of school--an important advantage by any standard. Though Americans like to look only at facts and numbers, the argument in favor of bilingual education is also about its symbolic value. To accommodate Hispanic children and give them a meaningful bilingual education sends a message of governmental acceptance, that federal authority cares, and that they, too, have a place in America.

Legislation

The Mexican problem is of such importance as to justify the utmost of thoughtful care in its solution; but it can be properly solved only with a full knowledge of all the facts. . . . Although the people of California are primarily interested in the problem from the standpoint of the best interests of our own state, nevertheless from its very nature it can be settled only by national legislation.

--Governor C. C. Young, 1930

Stances in the immigration debate generally lie between two extremes. *Restrictionists* seek to reduce immigration and *admissionists* want to maintain or increase current immigration levels. These viewpoints get as extreme as “no immigrants” and “open borders.” The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) is an example of an organization that is calling for a stop to immigration to allow recent arrivals and Americans time to adjust to one another. They would allow for minimal immigration of 200,000 to 300,000 a year during this adjustment period. FAIR contends that immigration contributes to overpopulation and environmental damage, displaces low-skilled American workers, depresses wage levels, and threatens U.S. culture.

The Wall Street Journal, on the other side of the debate, advocates unrestricted entry into the U.S. In a 1990 editorial *The Journal* proposed a five-word constitutional amendment: “there shall be open borders.” As the leading U.S. newspaper for the business world, it often cites ways in which immigration helps the economy and the labor force. Essentially, more people means more consumers and more laborers, helping the economy grow.

Actual legislation rarely gets as extreme as proposing complete restriction or unfettered admission. Yet because opinions surrounding immigration vary so much, legislation is inherently controversial. Take Proposition 187, for example, the attempt to deny citizenship and services to illegal immigrants in California. The main features of the proposition include:

1. refusing citizenship to children born on U.S. soil to illegal parents,
2. ending the legal requirement that the state provide emergency health care to illegal immigrants,
3. denying public education to children of illegal immigrants, and
4. creating tamper-proof identification cards for legal immigrants so they can receive benefits.¹

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This proposition passed by a narrow margin in 1994. Many people felt the proposition missed the reasons driving immigrants to the U.S. illegally. One dissident writes, “the main reason immigrants come to this country, legally or not, is to work. And let’s not kid ourselves--there are jobs waiting for them. Any serious effort against illegal immigration should start by coming down on those who hire undocumented workers. Don’t punish the worker’s children by denying them access to public schools.”² Concerning the education of illegal children, for example, the proposition ignores jobs as a primary reason for migration. The heart of the matter is that it is profoundly shortsighted to save a few dollars on the education of illegal children in light of the tax revenue losses that would result from the decrease in lifetime earnings, the cost of law enforcement and incarceration, emergency medical assistance, and other social problems related to the uneducated youth. It also assumes the false premise that a driving motivation for Mexicans to come north is to secure an American education for their children.

As the Hispanic population increases, legislators will have to respond to the needs of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans with a new attention to their needs. Legislators who are slow to grasp the growing power of this population will likely find themselves out of power. The Hispanics in this country demonstrated a political cohesiveness for the first time in the 1996 presidential elections. The percentage of votes more than doubled that of the previous elections. Election day was November 5, 1996, and it only took newspapers a few more days before beginning to publish articles about the unexpected turnout by Hispanic voters in southern California. The *New York Times* published the following statement on the front page:

The results of Tuesday’s balloting around the country made clear that the Democratic-leaning Hispanic vote is becoming an ever larger factor in American politics, nowhere more so than here in Orange County, the sprawling suburb south of Los Angeles that has traditionally been an icon of conservative Republicanism. In Orange County, as elsewhere in California, and in states like Arizona, Texas, and Florida, Hispanic voters showed up at the polls in record numbers, giving President Clinton 72 percent of their ballots. They also gave many other Democratic candidates in federal, state and local races major support and, in some cases, the edge needed for victory.³

Legislation

In 1930, Governor C.C. Young wisely stated that the “Mexican problem” justifies the utmost of thoughtful care in its solution. His advice is just as applicable today, nearly seventy years later. Part of that thoughtfulness means aiming solutions at the heart of the matter, attacking the reasons inciting illegal activity. Another part of that thoughtfulness means tuning in to Mexican constituents for a valuable perspective on what will work. Neither of these components is simple or clear-cut. Nor do they promise to be popular. Alan Simpson, the chairman of the subcommittee on immigration during the Reagan administration, commented in 1995, “In politics there are no right answers--only a continuing flow of compromises between groups, resulting in a changing, cloudy, and ambiguous series of public decisions, where appetite and ambition compete openly with knowledge and wisdom.”

NAFTA

*North American Free Trade Agreement, a.k.a.
Negative Agreement Frustrates True Advancement*

Now that NAFTA's effects can be viewed with five years of perspective, it's time to assess the plan. In a "School of Real-Life Results" report card administered by the Public Citizen, an organization to examine different policies, NAFTA took straight F's. Dissappointingly, the agreement failed to pass the most conservative test of all: a simple do-no-harm test. The very areas NAFTA proponents promised would improve actually suffered setbacks and decline.

The primary objective in creating NAFTA was to establish a comprehensive set of rules to improve and promote market access within North America. The agreement started a phaseout of almost all barriers to trade, a way to settle trade disputes fairly, protection for intellectual property rights, and the opening up of financial resources. By joining NAFTA, Mexico became a player in the world's largest free trade area, with an aggregate economy larger than that of the European Economic Community. The proponents of NAFTA promised the pact would include a wide array of attractive benefits. Benefits specific to Mexico include higher wages in Mexico, a growing U.S. trade surplus with Mexico, environmental clean-up and improved health along the border. All of these have failed to materialize.

Job creation was an issue of central focus for pro-NAFTA campaigners. NAFTA promised to create hundreds of thousands of high-paying U.S. jobs. Unfortunately, not only did NAFTA fail to create jobs for U.S. workers, hundreds of thousands of jobs were destroyed. There are over 200,000 U.S. workers documented as NAFTA casualties. These workers are now unemployed or working at jobs that pay less than the ones they lost.¹

Because of NAFTA, wage levels declined in both the U.S. and Mexico. Wage stagnation and minimal wage growth mark the 1990's for U.S. workers. Though NAFTA seemed to be the catalyst for sustained and economic expansion, there are many economists who blame the present wage stagnation on trade. William Kline of the pro- "free trade" Institute for International

NAFTA

Economics, argues that the sort of economic integration such as that generated by NAFTA has been responsible for 39% of the growth in wage inequality in the U.S.² As a result of NAFTA, U.S. manufacturing workers, whose average hourly pay is approximately \$18.74/hour,³ are in direct competition with maquila workers who are paid \$1.51/hour.⁴ No wonder U.S. companies such as General Motors, Huffy Bicycles, and RCA-Victor are flocking to move production south of the border.

If wage stagnation seems to be a gloomy effect in the U.S., plummeting wages are downright scary for Mexico. NAFTA was *supposed* to raise living standards in Mexico in order to help develop Mexico into a consumer society. The end in mind is to create a mature relationship between two trading partners. Since NAFTA's enactment, Mexican earnings have declined dramatically. In 1997, 7,771,607 Mexicans earned less than Mexico's legal minimum wage of \$3.40 a day, 20% more than in 1993.⁵ Salaries among Mexico's working class had fallen in 1997 to 60% of their 1994 value.⁶ Ironically, these wages are falling while productivity is increasing. Since NAFTA went into effect, the productivity of Mexican workers increased by 36.4%, while the wages declined by 29% between 1993 and 1997.⁷

The connection this miserably failing trade agreement has with immigration may at first seem elusive. Introducing a brief glimpse of NAFTA's negative impact underscores the idea that international trade agreements and development policies must be carefully evaluated. NAFTA has helped large international corporations, agribusiness, and other "big players." These companies can now freely shift production to the areas with the cheapest labor and the least-restrictive environmental laws. The laborers are suffering under the weight of corporate advancement. What was proposed as a plan to lift Mexico to a more stable economy and make it a mature trade partner has actually pushed the country into more miserable conditions (not to mention the negative consequence for the U.S.!). Until the U.S. and Mexico create plans that will bring Mexico out of economic exploitation, immigration will continue to be a challenge.

Push and Pull

Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States.

--Porfirio Diaz, 1830-1915, Mexican Dictator

The movement of Mexicans to the United States is the largest mass-population movement in history. Estimates put the percentage of Mexico's total population that has emigrated to the U.S. at 20 percent. Notably, this is in less than a hundred-year period. Of all the nationalities represented in America, Mexicans make up the largest nationality to come to the United States.

Immigration of such a magnitude is obviously on account of both "push" and "pull" factors. This phrase, "push and pull," refers to the pressure of one country to expel some of its population and the magnet effect of another country to draw them. When these two countries happen to be adjacent and share a 2,000 mile-long border, the push and pull effect is phenomenal.

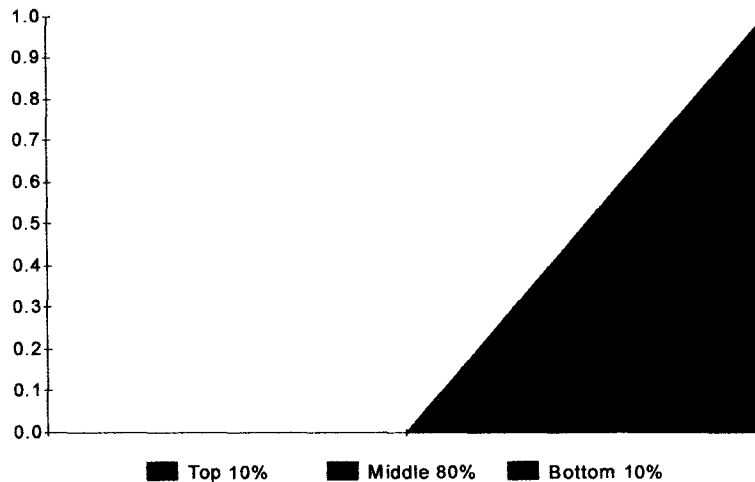
Mexico's long-term struggles push its citizens out at an alarming rate. For many Mexicans, immigration to the United States is their last hope, a safety valve for the workers Mexico cannot hold. These push factors include an exploding population. The population is doubling every twenty-eight years! The past twenty-eight years showed an increase from 48 million in 1970 to more than 100 million in the year 2000. Erratic job creation cannot keep up with unemployment needs (the Mexican labor force increases by more than one million workers per year); unemployment (unemployment or underemployment affects more than half of the entire Mexican labor force); recurring economic crises (the economic growth in this decade has not been higher than 2 percent in the best of times, and has been stagnant or negative in the downturns); devaluation and high inflation since the 1980s; and a growing gap between the wealthy and the rest of society (close to 20 percent of Mexicans earn less than \$75 dollars a year).¹

Mexico's economic crisis of 1994 marks the most dramatic one of the century. Layoffs that add to the unemployment rate and peso devaluation make the situation even more miserable. Peso devaluation diminishes the purchasing power of the Mexican currency and is necessarily accompanied by rising inflation and a further erosion of living standards by the middle and

Push and Pull

working classes.² This dramatically affects the entire country as the middle and working class account for more than 90 percent of the population. To illustrate the gap, the difference in household income is 36.6 percent in the wealthiest 10 percent of families and 1.8 percent in the poorest 10 percent of families. The top 20 percent of earners account for 55 percent of the income. Twenty-seven percent of the population is below the poverty line. Unfortunately, indications are that this crisis will not be short-lived. Most analysts seem to concur that the recovery of Mexico will be gradual and spread out over several years.³

Economic Disparity Between Mexico's Wealthiest and Poorest 10%



On top of these forces pushing Mexicans to search for greener pastures, the United States has an undeniable need for labor. "Acknowledging this reality, the agricultural interests in the U.S. Southwest have already successfully lobbied the Agricultural Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives for exemptions on restrictive immigration measures, dismissing altogether the pervasive political rhetoric and anti-immigrant policies."⁴ The argument that usually arises at this point is that these jobs should be reserved for American workers. America's *need* for immigrant labor is not commonly addressed by the media or politicians as a validation for continued immigration. The general public's perception is that immigrant workers come here and steal "our" jobs.

Push and Pull

To talk of immigrant workers coming to America and “stealing” American jobs implies a very narrow understanding of the American labor force or the realities of the global economy. The subtle omission is that the “American labor force” is becoming a thing of the past. Jobs that can be sent offshore are exported to low-skilled laborers who are more than willing to work for far less than their American counterparts. These jobs are mainly those in manufacturing and large industry that can be easily relocated and that enjoy the benefits of global wage competition. In the wake is left a low-skilled sector of the American populace forced to compete more fiercely for jobs left for industrial workers, or to move into different areas of the marketplace.

Then there are those jobs that are tied to American soil: Caring for the elderly, cleaning hotel rooms, and washing dishes in the steamy backrooms of restaurants. U.S. crops cannot be harvested overseas. However, despite the immobility of these types of jobs, globalization leaves its mark nonetheless. The immigrant worker enters the picture, creating for American business a similar effect of shipping the jobs off to foreign soil. The difference is that much of the immigrant labor force is illegal, leaving itself highly exploitable. Employers may not always be aware of the illegal status of their employees (after all, they’d prefer to not ask too many questions). What they are aware of is the fact that they have access to a source of labor which has no legitimate way to complain, demand rights, or challenge adherence to the law--assuming the immigrants know enough about the law to know when they have an injustice to report.

More revealing are the findings that the cries against immigrants coming here and taking our jobs are far more deeply rooted in ideology than in actual economic fear. National surveys by political scientists seem to indicate that an individual’s position on immigration is not affected by his or her economic situation (type of employment, income, wage depression, job loss, or other circumstances affecting the quality of work).

Such findings may reflect the realities of a labor market in which fewer and fewer Americans--particularly white, middle-class voters--ever compete directly with immigrants for jobs or hold jobs whose wages have been depressed by large numbers of immigrants in a given company or industry. But the data also may indicate that non-economic factors, especially culture and ethnicity, have become more

Push and Pull

salient in shaping Americans' attitudes toward immigration. Survey respondents who have negative views on Hispanics and Asians as ethnic groups--not just as immigrants--are more likely to prefer a restrictive immigration policy than other people are.⁶

Americans conveniently hide racism and xenophobia behind concern that immigrants take American jobs. The reality is that jobs on American soil are waiting for immigrants, providing a powerful magnet for those looking for work.

Thus, as Mexico's economy sighs with relief as some of its population seeps out, America's economy is hungry for low-skilled laborers who are desperate for work. Fortunately, the transfer of labor is beneficial to both countries in more ways than one. Mexicans often send large portions of their paycheck home to their families in Mexico. This actually provides significant cash flow to the country and accounts for a large source of Mexican revenue. Not only do remittances back to family keep those families surviving, they play a factor in the survival of the hometowns and help the local and national economy. Furthermore, Mexico is already hardpressed to meet the economic and social needs of its citizenry. When some of those citizens immigrate, the burden is that much more alleviated.

The United States economy also reaps plentiful benefits from Mexican laborers. In many cases, the Mexican worker is filling a job at which North American workers would snub their nose. The service sector, which is a clearly growing sector of the U.S. economy, is made up of unstable, low-paying jobs. The Mexican workforce has filled the need willingly. These jobs are less than desirable for the average American worker, but an opportune improvement for the Mexican worker. The Mexican presence is growing not only in the service sector, but also in the agricultural, domestic, construction, and textile industries. The large supply of labor at minimum-wage prices, with little to no offer of benefits, has enabled North American employers to keep prices stable for many products.

In addition to the advantage of a plentiful supply of cheap labor, in the case of illegals, Mexicans pay dearly for benefits they will not claim. Economists study the effects of illegals and the fiscal impact the undocumented Mexicans will have on a particular city, county, or industry. The conclusion is that the immigrants contribute much more to the economy than they take out.

Push and Pull

After all, they pay state and in many cases federal taxes for which they will never claim any benefits. America, too, is a winner in the labor trade.

To attempt to counter the natural push and pull factors between the U.S. and Mexico would cause a strain on both countries. Americans would see the prices for many products and commodities go up and would feel the effects of fewer low-skilled laborers in the economy. Mexicans would feel the economic growing pains of their country more bitterly, adding tension and social unrest--breeding grounds for an uprising. Clearly, there is more incentive for maintaining immigration and channeling effort and energy into more productive, mutually-beneficial relationships allowing Mexicans to come here legally, than there is to continue the futile attempt to stop or reduce Mexican immigration. The desperate need for better paying work in Mexico and the readiness to hire in America create a situation that will defy virtually any law in its way.

And that, really, is the heart of why illegals continue to come. As long as they're poor and we're rich, illegal immigration will be an issue. A political science professor at Yale points out that "powerful moral traditions that go back to the Declaration of Independence" call for a compassionate U.S. immigration policy. "We remain an extremely privileged and affluent country in a world of suffering." As long as that remains true, the highest walls and the most punitive measures will not staunch the flow northward.

The Price Tag

Is it price you are concerned about, friend? Or is it cost?

--Zig Ziglar

To avoid the mounds of rhetoric surrounding the immigration debate, one must examine the numbers. The consensus of public opinion seems to be that immigrants are a net cost to the citizens of the United States. The truth can be found in the dusty economic reports full of academic verbosity and statisticians' charts, graphs, and differentials. The process of plowing through these reports is a combination of reading about modern economic theory while suffering flashbacks from calculus class. Perhaps this is why the truth about immigrant cost versus gain is rarely addressed in a medium which would reach the population at large.

That said, the following are conclusions from such a scholarly work by J. Simon. This is a comprehensible summary of the economic effects immigrants to the U.S. have on natives. This is the one chapter in which it is impractical to isolate Mexicans; the findings reported here apply to immigrants at large. Furthermore, unless specifically addressed, the information should be assumed to refer to legal immigration.

One would think that the conception that immigrants are so costly comes from the volume of immigrants coming today. Interestingly, the numbers of immigrants that enter the United States today are comparable to the numbers at the turn of the century. The difference is that the burden of absorbing immigrants was far greater in the early nineteen hundreds than it is now because of the difference in overall population size. Consider the difference: immigrants who arrived between 1901 and 1910 constituted 9.6 percent of the population; those who arrived between 1991 and 2000 constituted roughly 2.7 percent. History proves that the United States can handle waves of immigrants in excess of the current swell.

With any discussion of quantity, quality also lies in the balance. "The central economic fact now--and also throughout human history--is that, in contrast to the rapidly aging U.S. population, immigrants tend to arrive in their 20s and 30s, when they are physically and mentally

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vigorous and in the prime of their work lives.”¹ On average, immigrants have as much education as does the native population. Moreover, immigrants are disproportionately professional and technical persons, an added plus for the U.S.

Behavioral characteristics distinguish immigrants as particularly desirable from the economic point of view. Their rate of participation in the labor force is higher than natives, they tend to save more, they apply more effort during working hours, and they have a higher propensity to start new businesses and to be self-employed. They do not have a higher propensity to commit crime or to be unemployed.

One of the most resounding cries against immigrants is that “they come here and use our services!” It is a true statement, indeed. The debate should not be one in which the obvious is stated, but rather one which examines the balance (or unbalance) of drain from the public coffers versus taxed paid. Analysis of a large Census Bureau survey shows that, contrary to popular belief, immigrants do not use more transfer payments and public services than do natives; surprisingly, they use much smaller amounts overall.

The services that get the most attention are welfare and Supplemental Security, unemployment compensation, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and food stamps. There is almost no difference in usage levels between immigrant families and native families of similar education and age. Schooling costs (the greatest cost associated with immigration) are somewhat higher for the immigrants after the first few years in the U.S. because their families are younger than native families, on average. However, when public retirement programs are included--Social Security, Medicare, and the like--immigrant families on average are seen to receive much less total welfare payments and public services than do average native families.

Social Security is a dominating force in the system of transfers and taxes, the massive transfer of wealth from the young to the old. Immigrants actually buffer the cost of Social Security to natives. Once an immigrant couple retires and begins to collect Social Security, the couple typically has raised children who are then contributing Social Security taxes and in doing

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so balance out the parents' receipts. This is also the case with typical native families. A closer look reveals a one-time benefit to natives because the immigrants generally do not arrive accompanied by a generation of elderly parents who might receive Social Security. Immigrants actually ease the burden Social Security places on the nation's economic policy.

Frank Bean, a nationally-recognized demographer at the University of Texas at Austin, specifically studied poverty levels and welfare reciprocity among Latinos. He found that Latinos falling below the poverty line are less likely to receive welfare than their native counterparts. Although Latino poverty levels increased, the rate at which they used welfare decreased, as opposed to natives who were increasing their rate of welfare reciprocity. Bean's study also indicates that much of the general increase in welfare use by immigrants can be directly attributed to refugees, who are immediately eligible to receive a wide array of public benefits upon arrival to the United States. Interestingly, those refugees who use public aid initially achieve greater mobility toward economic independence. Essentially, reports Dr. Harry Pachon, president of the Tomas Rivera Center, "The results of this report directly contradict the negative stereotypes that are created about Latino immigrants." He goes on to say that "the study reaffirms previous social science research that demonstrates a commitment to a strong work ethic and risk-taking behavior by immigrants."²

If it were the case that immigrants paid relatively small amounts in taxes, they would drain more off the public than they contribute (despite their relatively lower use of welfare services). However this is not the case; immigrants pay higher amounts of taxes. Immigrant families' tax contributions can be estimated from data based on family earnings. Within three to five years after entry, immigrant family earnings reach and surpass those of the average native family. The higher earnings are due primarily to the fact that immigrant families are typically younger and in their prime working years. Furthermore, the longer an immigrant family lives in the U.S., the greater their family earnings grow. Thus, immigrants use fewer services and pay higher taxes than do natives. Taken together, this data on services used and taxes paid shows substantial differences in favor of natives.

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It is important to consider that illegals who cross into the U.S. get little in welfare services due to their status. Estimates of the proportions of illegals using such services are: Free medical, 5%; unemployment insurance, 4%; food stamps, 1%; welfare payments, 1%; child schooling, 4%. Practically no illegals use Social Security, which is the costliest service of all. However, illegals must pay for services they cannot use. Seventy-seven percent of illegal workers paid Social Security taxes, and 73% had federal income tax withheld. There are cost-benefit studies that drive this point home, showing that illegal immigrants pay five to ten times as much in taxes as the cost of the welfare services which they use.

More so than the fear of immigrants using public services, Americans fear that more immigrants means fewer jobs for native workers. The argument is logical on a surface level: If the number of jobs is a fixed amount, and immigrants take some jobs, then there are fewer jobs available for Americans to take. This argument works in theory and perhaps for a short time in reality, but not over the long haul.

The demand for a particular worker is inflexible in a very short period of time. Therefore, additional immigrants in a given occupation must have some negative impact on wages and/or employment among people in that occupation. Moreover, there must also be some general unemployment while the economy adjusts to the increase in workers. The issue in question is whether this effect is substantial or minimal.

To gauge the degree of this effect, a model based on queuing theory is used, using estimates on such factors as the average length of time persons who lose jobs remain unemployed. Based on this line of reasoning, an additional immigrant is likely to cause less than two months of additional unemployment for natives. Immigrants actually decrease native unemployment to the extent that immigrants consume and purchase before they go to work.

Several studies have tackled the matter of "displacement" empirically using a variety of approaches. Not one of these studies found across-the-board unemployment caused by immigrants, either in the U.S. as a whole or in particular areas of relatively high immigration.

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Effects on particular groups are surprisingly small or non-existent, even among Blacks and women--two groups who seem to be at special risk from Mexican immigrants.

Thus, the fear that immigrants come here and simply take Americans' jobs is unfounded. Not only do they take jobs, they make jobs--an important element in the big economic picture. Moreover, they create new jobs directly by their propensity to start their own businesses.

All of this is fine and good, but the critical reader is still skeptical. What about wages? Take Native Nick and Immigrant Iris, for a simple explanation here. More immigrants outside of Native Nick's occupation--especially people with different levels of education--improve Nick's earning situation because they are a complement to him. For example, if Nick is highly skilled and educated, he will benefit from having low-skilled immigrants available, just as a highly-trained surgeon benefits from less-skilled helpers. Conversely, if Nick is a low-skilled worker, he will benefit when Immigrant Iris comes to add to the highly-skilled workers. The problem arises when Nick and Iris have the same skill level. Iris is competition for Nick and thereby drives down the wage level. "Evidence concerning both the competitive and complementary effects on wages suggests that the effects are small, at least in the U.S., but competitive effects are observed to drive down some natives' wages."³

Because illegal immigrants tend to have lower-than-average amounts of human capital, they tend to increase the competition for native unskilled workers. However, the damage to natives is far less than commonly imagined. The overall economic effect of the illegals is positive in that they use very small amounts of public services but pay for them just as legal citizens do. They are simply too afraid of apprehension to contest this imbalance of give and take. The net effect is that they pay income and Social Security taxes many times the cost of the services that they use.

The fundamental question to ask at this point is: If immigration policymakers were to take these basic economic principles into account, what would immigration policy look like? The United States can afford to take immigrants in at a rate equal to, or even far above, the present rate of admission. In fact, the average standard of living improves in this scenario. Americans

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even profit when taking in refugees. Taking in more immigrants is not simply a charitable deed, but a basic way to increase incomes in the future. Thus, an increase in total immigration is positive for the United States.

It is important to understand that the recommendation here is merely an increase, not open-door policy. Extremes are risky in that they are unpredictable. There are two sound reasons for not adopting unlimited amounts of immigrants. First, there is no way to predict how many people would choose to immigrate to the United States in the short and long run. It would be impossible to predict not only the volume and the rate of flows to the U.S., but also the quality of immigrants based on education and skill. Unlimited immigration could change the mix of immigrants to a point where the economic benefit is lost.

Second, there is no empirical evidence to estimate the point of diminishing return. It is necessarily true that the economic benefits of immigrants at present levels and small multiples of present levels would reach a point of negative economic effects at levels many times the current flow. Thus, it makes the most sense to increase immigration levels in small increments in order to monitor the effects of more immigrants without passing the point to which adding more is beneficial.

The conclusion is clear: Immigrants are a benefit to natives at a national level. It is only in smaller proportions of the population that the conclusion becomes more ambiguous. Different states are likely to feel the impact of immigrants differently because each state takes on varying degrees of responsibility for social services. More than that, some states have much higher rates of immigrant settlement than others. At the local level, high rates of immigration are more likely to be a fiscal burden, though not necessarily. The best approach is to recognize that benefits clearly exist and to figure out how to spread those benefits more equally among the population.

The Burden of Knowing

I assert that the people of the United States . . . have sufficient patriotism and sufficient intelligence to sit in judgment on every question which has arisen or which will arise, no matter how long our government will endure.

The great political questions are, in their final analysis, great moral questions . . .
--William Jennings Bryan, 1909

Even if no opinions are formed one way or the other, the reader *must* acknowledge that Mexican immigration is a complex issue. So complex, in fact, that two people could look at the same situation or the same numbers and come up with different conclusions based on each person's perception of what is best for the United States. Some will value ethnic homogeneity over changing demographics. Others will value increasing the numbers of workers in the marketplace over limiting the supply of workers. Some will value exclusion over inclusion; others will value increasing the present levels of immigrants accepted. Furthermore, immigration is an issue in which terms such as justice, equality, and fairness evoke different ideas.

An underlying idea established by this essay is that both historically and today, the United States uses Mexican immigration to its advantage. Legal immigrants are clearly beneficial to the United States. Much of the evidence surrounding illegal immigration proves it to be beneficial as well. The illegal population seems to be more a nuisance than a real threat. Lawmakers and the Border Patrol (not to mention the general public) are frustrated by our inability to curb the illegal flow effectively. However, this frustration is an expression of lack of control. The illegal population is not causing any serious damage. Moreover, the illegal population comes in large part as an overspill of our own recruiting efforts to bring needed workers here. Immigrants come in response to jobs or to reunify with their families. What gets lost in the fuss is the fact that the U.S. holds out a carrot on a stick through guestworker programs; that it is difficult to staunch an overflow of workers and family members is not surprising.

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So, what now? It is always difficult to stare in the eyes of an international challenge, knowing that time, effort, and real solutions (not Band-Aids) are required. This difficulty is the “burden of knowing,” a full awareness of the need that burdens one to be part of the solution.

Because immigration is a fact of life, less energy should be wasted on the racist, hostile, or futile areas of this issue (such as supporting triple fencing along the border, or hyperbolizing Texas as the next Quebec), and more energy should be devoted to maximizing the benefits to *both* countries. U.S. citizens should make more of an effort to understand the *reasons* for high immigration and worry less about the effects. To moan over displaced U.S. workers, for example, and ignore the reasons driving Mexicans here for jobs is a backwards strategy. Finally, U.S. citizens should take on a mature, informed position in the immigration debate, recognizing that Mexican immigrants do not deserve to be the convenient scapegoats for all our national woes.

Though not everyone is called to take up immigration as his or her personal cause, there are four simple ways anyone can make a difference.

1. Examine the information.

Realize that there are many people who have an agenda when it comes to dealing with immigration. Look closely at the information and the way in which it is gathered and presented. Statistics are meant to represent reality, not create reality; be careful of those who round up a herd of Pit Bulls to prove that all dogs bite. There are several reasons people try to fabricate trends. The most obvious reasons are to draw a crowd, catch an audience, or turn heads. Another reason is budget lobbying. Competition for funds makes it very tempting to dramatize the need for those funds. Finally, campaign politics provides a hotbed for misused statistics. It is much easier for a politician to raise fear among voters than it is to raise money.¹ And once the information is examined? Vote. Vote, vote, vote.

2. Fight stereotypes.

“There you have it. They’re back again. Those lazy, shiftless immigrants who come here to steal our jobs, our country, and probably our women, too.”² Recognize ignorance and racism for what they are. Perhaps the most powerful stand we can take in the immigration debate is that which treats legal and illegal “aliens” as legal and illegal human beings, deserving the same decency as anyone else.

3. Declare intolerance for exploitation.

The question we must ask ourselves once we recognize that immigrants are beneficial to the United States is “beneficial at what cost?” Though the fiscal impacts are good for the U.S. citizen, they are not necessarily fair to the immigrant. In purely economic terms, slavery was beneficial to the growth and economy of the United States. But how do we assess the cost of a subjugated people in humanitarian terms? We can’t, though all would agree, more than 100 years later, that we are *still* paying a very high price. In a loose sense of the word, Mexican immigrants are our modern-day slaves. This is especially so for illegals. Though many might argue that the conditions and exploitation Mexicans endure are justifiable because they come here voluntarily, that rationale doesn’t fit the image of a nation that prides itself as the democratic leader of the world. Put simply, it doesn’t make sense to fatally favor the stronger United States over a weaker neighbor.

4. Understand that wealth is better shared than hoarded.

As U.S. citizens, we have great difficulty understanding what it’s like for the Third World to border Our World. Even the most needy and poor among us are affluent by global standards. A U.S. citizen is one who has won the ovarian lottery. Just look at the odds of being born into a country of convenience and advantage: If we could shrink the earth’s population to a village of 100 people with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look like this:

The Burden of Knowing

- 57 Asians
- 21 Europeans
- *14 from the western hemisphere*
- 8 Africans
- 70 non-white
- 30 white
- 70 non-Christian
- 30 professing Christianity of any kind
- 89 heterosexual
- 11 homosexual
- *60% of the entire world's wealth would be in the hands of 6 people, and all 6 people would be citizens of the United States*
- *80 living in sub-standard housing*
- *70 unable to read*
- *50 suffering from malnutrition*
- *1 with a college education*
- *1 with a computer*

To be so affluent in a world of great need calls for a step back from selfishness and a willingness to *use* the power and influence we as a nation have worked so hard to achieve, to bend down and help others instead of ambitiously widening the global gap.

So really, it's not about Mexican immigration. Not entirely. It's about realizing that the whole world dreams the "American dream" and only so many actually get to live it in waking moments. The few who do must be careful to acknowledge that we are all connected on this spinning ball of mud. The strength of humanity cannot be overshadowed by the apparent differences of skin color, language, religion, or heritage. Mexicans are unique from Americans only in that they seek new homes and new jobs in a country whose citizenry may never fully understand the need to do so.

*People and their cultures perish in isolation,
but they are born or reborn in contact with other men and women,
with men and women of another culture, another creed, another race. If we do not
recognize our humanity in others, we shall not recognize it in ourselves.*

--Carlos Fuentes, Mexican writer and social critic

Mexican Immigration: A Chronology

1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, making possible the expulsion of “aliens” who represent “a danger to the peace and security” of the nation.

1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico.

1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the Mexico War and protecting cultural and property rights of Mexicans choosing to become US citizens and to remain within the expanded borders of United States (treaty basis for bilingual education and ballots).

1860s-70s Most US-citizen Mexicans stripped of their lands and rights, some lynched.

1876-1911 “Porfiriato,” the extremely repressive dictatorship of army brigadier general Porfirio Diaz.

1882 Increase in flow of Mexican immigrant workers; Immigration Act, removing states’ power to regulate immigration.

Mid-1880s Contract labor laws prohibiting importation of foreign labor under contract.

1900-33 As demand for Mexican labor continues to grow, an estimated one-eighth of Mexico’s population moves to US.

1909 US-Mexico treaty for importation of Mexican laborers to harvest sugarbeet fields of California.

1910-1917 Mexican Revolution, armed uprising against wealthy elites.

1917 February: Congress overrode President Wilson’s veto to enact the first truly restrictive immigration law; May: Importation of Mexican workers again legalized in face of labor shortages caused by US entry into World War I.

1920s “Box laws” proposed in Congress to place a ceiling on number of Mexican immigrants.

1921 Temporary Quota Act, adding quantitative regulations to immigration law--the first step toward quotas.

1924 Immigration Act, making official the quota system that lasts until 1952, establishing the country’s only national police force, the US Border Patrol, and providing for deportation of those who become public charges, violate US law, or engage in alleged anarchist or seditionist acts.

1929 Legislation fixing the quota system according to a complex formula guaranteeing the numerical predominance of white people in the population and making it a crime for a previously deported “alien” to try to enter the country again.

*Mexican Immigration:
A Chronology*

1930s Hundreds of thousands of Mexicans rounded up and deported during “Mexican scare” in early years of Great Depression.

1942 Bilateral bracero program introduced, providing 5 million Mexican laborers for US employers during the next two decades.

1943 “Zoot-Suit Riots” in California sparked by racist attacks on Mexicans.

1948 Displaced Persons Act, first US refugee legislation.

1951 Public Law 78 (PL78), extending bracero program and granting secretary of labor power to set wages for Mexican workers.

1954 “Operation Wetback,” deporting 1.1 million or more Mexicans.

1963-64 Legislation providing for termination of bracero program, officially ending in on December 31, 1964.

1965 Civil rights legislation amending 1952 McCarran-Walter Act to repeal national origins quota system and replace it with one based on family reunification, needed skills, and political refuge. Lyndon Johnson signs into law hotly debated bill limiting legal immigration from the Western Hemisphere to 120,000 annually.

1976 Legislation placing 20,000 annual ceiling on each Western Hemisphere country, *including Mexico* (first numerical restriction on legal Mexican immigration).

1977 President Carter proposes amnesty for those in the country since 1970, prohibition of hiring of “illegals,” and construction of fence (“tortilla curtain”) along US-Mexico border.

1980s Nativist attacks reminiscent of 19th century, focusing on Mexicans as well as other Latinos, Asians, and Middle Eastern peoples; Border Patrol detentions surpass a million per year, many of them repeat entries from Mexico. Some 50,000 activists participate in religious-oriented “sanctuary movement” for political refugees from Central America.

1982 Debt crisis hits Mexico leading to devaluation of the peso; Mexicans migrate north in even greater numbers.

1983-4 Simpson-Mazzoli bill hotly debated.

1986 Simpson-Rodino bill signed into law by Reagan; Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) passed.

1994 Proposition 187 passed by California voters on November 8, 1994; NAFTA signed. Peso devaluation rocks Mexico.

Notes

Note: When background or frequently documented information is available in a variety of primary and secondary sources, specific references are not offered in these notes.

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